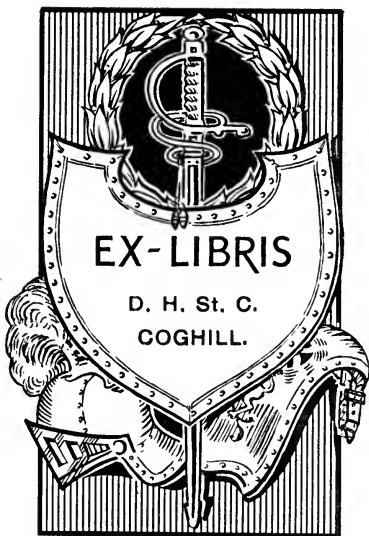


ITALIAN GARDENS  
OF THE RENAISSANCE

JULIA CARTWRIGHT

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ITALIAN GARDENS OF THE  
RENAISSANCE







*Photo: Anderson, Rome*

A CARDINAL'S PLEASURE-HOUSE  
(Villa d'Este, Tivoli)

# ITALIAN GARDENS OF THE RENAISSANCE

AND OTHER STUDIES

BY

JULIA CARTWRIGHT

AUTHOR OF

"MADAME, ISABELLA D'ESTE," "THE PERFECT COURTIER"  
"THE PAINTERS OF FLORENCE," ETC.

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

"What of the way of the world gone Maying,  
What of the work of the buds in the bowers,  
What of the will of the wind on the wall,  
Thinking of hours when the flowers have to fall?"  
—SWINBURNE.

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1914

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Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & CO.  
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IN MEMORY OF  
ENID, LADY LAYARD

AND OF HAPPY DAYS AT  
CA' CAPELLO, VENICE





## PREFACE

THESE sketches on Renaissance Gardens and their makers were first written at the suggestion of a lamented friend, whose memory is honoured and cherished by men and women of all classes and nationalities throughout Italy, Enid, Lady Layard. Everything connected with Venice, where she made her home for the last thirty-five years of her life, was dear to her, more especially the traditions which linger about the *palazzi* and *piazze*, the narrow canals and *calli* with which she had so close and intimate an acquaintance. And she loved the villas and gardens of the mainland, the district of Asolo and the Trevigiana, the shores of the Brenta and the Lago di Garda, the green slopes of the Berici and Euganean hills. Nor was her love of Italy confined to any one province. Umbria and Tuscany, Fiesole and Settignano, the stately fragments of Roman gardens, the villas of Tivoli and the Campagna, were alike dear to Lady Layard, and her memory still haunts these enchanted regions.

To-day most of the gardens described in these pages have unfortunately perished, and only live in the writings of Renaissance humanists, in the prose of

## ITALIAN GARDENS OF THE RENAISSANCE

Boccaccio and Bembo, in the verse of Poliziano and Ariosto. But the enthusiasm for beauty and the ardent love of Nature which inspired their creators are themes of which the scholar and the poet will never tire.

Four of these studies appeared in the *Nineteenth Century and After*, and are reprinted by the kind permission of the editor, Mr. Wray Skilbeck. The paper on "Cardinal Bembo and his Villa" first saw the light in the *Cornhill*, that on "The Certosa of Val d' Ema" was published many years ago in the *Portfolio*, then edited by Mr. Philip Hamerton, and is now reprinted by Messrs. Seeley's permission, while I have to thank Mr. John Murray for leave to include in this volume the account of the warrior Guidarelli's "Tomb at Ravenna," which originally appeared in the *Monthly Review*. The article on Giovanni Costa, the Roman painter and patriot, was first published in the *National Review*, and is reprinted by the courtesy of Mr. Leo Maxse; that on "Bianca Sforza," the short-lived daughter of Lodovico Sforza, whose portrait in the Ambrosian Library we all know, is entirely new.

JULIA CARTWRIGHT.

OCKHAM, *October 1*, 1914.

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# ITALIAN GARDENS OF THE RENAISSANCE

## THE GARDENS OF FLORENTINE HUMANISTS

"I' mi trovai, fanciulle, un bel mattino  
Di mezzo Maggio, in un verde giardino."

ANGELO POLIZIANO.

THE Italian humanists of the Renaissance, like the citizens of Utopia, set great store by their gardens. The newly awakened delight in the beauty of nature and the passionate interest in classical antiquity which marked the age, early led scholars to follow the example of the ancient Romans in this respect. They read Quintilian and Varro, pondered over the pages of Pliny and Columella, and turned their thoughts once more to the long-lost art of gardening. In Bacon's famous phrase, "they began first to build stately, then to garden finely."

The love of fresh air and sunshine, the spirit of independence, and taste for roving soon caused men and women to seek the countryside. Tuscan poets took up the strain and sang the joys of the open road

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and the pleasant May-time. Folgore, the chivalrous poet of San Gimignano—"San Fina's town of the beautiful towers"—bade youths and maidens leave the city for the villa with the first breath of June, and whisper their secrets in the shady groves where roses bloom and fountains keep the grass green through the parching summer days. Lapo Gianni prayed that he might spend his life with fair women in bowers where the leaves are always green and the birds never cease their songs. And Franco Sacchetti, the gayest singer of them all, called on his company of pleasure-seekers to fling care to the winds, and, leaving grave thoughts within the city walls, escape to the olive-woods and the hills, the villa and the gardens where the blessed Spring awaited them.

Towards the close of the thirteenth century, Piero Crescenzi, a jurist of Bologna, wrote a Latin treatise on Agriculture, which he dedicated to Charles II, King of Naples, the son and successor of Charles of Anjou. The eighth book of this work is devoted to pleasure-gardens, which the author divides into three classes, those of poor men, those of persons of moderate fortunes, and those of wealthy nobles and kings. "Each of these," Piero writes, "should be adorned with sweet-scented flowers, arbours of clipped trees, grassy lawns, and, if possible, a sparkling fountain to lend joy and brightness to the scene. A pergola of vines will afford



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shade in the noonday heats, but in small gardens it is well to plant no trees on the lawn, and to leave the grass exposed to the pure airs and sunshine." For the ordinary person, two to four acres of ground should be sufficient, but twenty acres would be more fitting for kings and nobles. But since those personages who have the means to satisfy their fancies are generally too ignorant or indolent to lay out their own gardens, the writer proceeds to lay down rules for their guidance. "A royal garden," he says, "should be girt about with walls; a fine palace should stand on the south side, with flower-beds, orchards, and fishponds, and on the north side, a thick wood should be planted to afford shade and protect the garden from cruel winds." A pavilion or casino, to serve as a dwelling-place in the summer, should be placed in some part of the grounds, surrounded with green palisades, while evergreen trees, such as the pine, the cypress and ilex, which are never bare of leaves, should be planted for ornament during the winter months. Nor should a menagerie of wild animals be wanting, or an aviary of singing birds, who should be allowed to fly at will among the trees.

Messer Piero's maxims seem to have met with general approval from his fellow-countrymen, and indicate the lines on which most Renaissance gardens were laid out. As the sense of security increased, as men became rich and prosperous, country-houses and gardens

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sprang up everywhere. Petrarch had his *villetta* near the fountain of Vacluse, and two gardens, the one sacred to Apollo, the other to Bacchus, where he was never tired of contemplating the sky, the mountains, and the waters, and where he would gladly have spent the rest of his life, "were Avignon not so near, and Italy not so far."

"If love of my own things and the force of ancient habit do not deceive me, there is no place in the world better fitted to inspire noble thoughts and lofty dreams." So the poet wrote from Lombardy to his old friend Guido Settimo, Archdeacon of Genoa, who was staying at the villa in his absence. He goes on to speak of the *orticella*, where he has planted fruit trees of every kind with his own hand, being at once architect and gardener, and begs the priest to go on with the work.

"I have been told," he writes, "by the oldest inhabitants of the place, more especially by my own servant, who is most experienced in agricultural matters, that whatever is planted on the 6th of February always flourishes and is never affected by any evil influences. So, when this day comes round, especially if it falls under a good moon, be sure to plant some new tree in the garden, in order that if we are allowed to spend our old age in this spot, your tree may be fairer and its foliage thicker than that of any other. Meanwhile enjoy the trees which are there, both the oldest that were planted by Bacchus and Minerva, and the youngest that were planted by my own hands, and which have grown

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so fast that they promise to shelter not only our descendants but ourselves. . . . But why, oh why, do I recall every detail of my *villetta*? Never can I gaze on the beauty of earth and sky without remembering my villa and those with whom I long to spend my few remaining days.”<sup>1</sup>

In his old age, Petrarch was fortunate enough to find another home on Italian soil, at Arquà, in the Euganean hills, where he built himself a villa “*piccola, ma graziosa*,” and spent the last years of his life in the peaceful enjoyment of the beautiful prospect and sweet, wholesome air. The low white-walled house is still standing in the olive-woods on the heights above Arquà, and the garden, with its medlars and pomegranates, its vines and acacias, is little altered since he lived there. During centuries it has been the goal of pilgrims from all lands, who, like Bembo and Niccolò da Correggio, Byron and Shelley, have climbed the hill to visit the poet’s tomb near the church, and have looked down from the loggia of Petrarch’s home on the “waveless plain of Lombardy” stretching far away in the blue distance.

While Petrarch was counting his fruit-trees and defending his garden from the Naiads of the Sorgue, another Florentine, Boccaccio, was writing those inimitable pages in which he describes the gardens of

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere di F. Petrarca* (G. Fracassetti), iv. 41.

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Poggio Gherardo and Villa Palmieri, near his home at Settignano. In the introduction to the *Decamerone*, he tells us how Pampinea led her joyous troop up the little hill, far from the dusty highway, to a fair palace surrounded by green lawns and spacious gardens, all neatly kept, and full of such flowers as belonged to the season. "Here," she said, "it is good and pleasant to stay," and Filomena crowned her brow with green laurel leaves, while a table decked with the whitest of linen cloths, with boughs of yellow broom and silver vessels, was set out in the court. On Sunday mornings the fair ladies descended from the heights, and the Queen led the way along an unfrequented lane, where some twenty nightingales sang, and herbs and flowers were just opening to the rising sun, to the Villa Schifanoia (Sans-Souci), afterwards known as Villa Palmieri. Here they wondered at the beauty of the gardens, at the broad alleys shaded by pergolas, laden with purple grapes, and bordered with red and white roses and jessamine, "that filled the air with sweet scents and shut out the rays of the sun, not only in the morning, but at noonday, so that one could always walk there without fear." More delightful than all was the lawn of the finest and greenest grass, spangled with a thousand flowers and surrounded by orange and citron trees, bearing ripe fruit and blossoms at the same time. In the centre stood a



*Photo: Atinari, Florence*

THE VILLA URBANA  
(Villa Palmieri)



## GARDENS OF FLORENTINE HUMANISTS

white marble fountain, marvellously carved, sending up a jet of water, which, falling with delicious sound into a crystal basin, was carried through little channels into all parts of the garden, and finally poured down into the valley with such force as to turn the wheels of two mills, "much, as you may suppose, to the profit of the owner."

The mills on the Mugnone are still standing, and the gardens where Boccaccio's ladies danced and feasted and told their witty tales have been described by many other eloquent pens.

Both Petrarch and Boccaccio lived when the dawn of the new learning was breaking in the sky, and in Sir Philip Sidney's phrase, "the morning did strew roses and violets on the heavenly floor, against the coming of the sun." But, in the fifteenth century, when men and women were bent on enjoying life in all its fulness—and individual expression had become a passionate necessity—there was a great outburst of garden-making. The newborn love of nature penetrated every phase of society. It stirred the heart of Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini as he watched the changing lights on the slopes of Monte Amiata and the gnarled stems of the oaks that overshadow the ravines in the Volscian country. It moved Ser Lapo Mazzei, that very prosaic-minded notary of Prato, to ride out to his villa at Grignano, in the cool of the evening, and help

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his labourers tie up the vines and dig the garden. And it impelled Buonaccorso Pitti, the father of the great Messer Luca, to buy a farm at Bogole, which afterwards became famous as the site of the Boboli gardens. This honest citizen took as much delight in his fruit-trees as Petrarch, and kept a daily record of their growth and numbers. "On this day, the 24th of April 1419," he writes in his diary, "I counted all the trees that bear fruit in our gardens and vineyards, not including walnut-trees. I find 564 trees in all, 60 olive, 164 fig, 106 peach, 58 cherry, 24 almond, 5 pomegranate, 25 apple, 16 pear, 2 quince, and 4 filbert-trees."<sup>1</sup>

It was left for Leo Battista Alberti to paint the joys and virtue of country-life in his admirable treatise, *Del Governo della Famiglia*. The sentiments which he puts into the lips of Agnolo Pandolfini, the excellent wool-merchant, who, weary of trade and politics, has retired to his villa at Signa, are worthy of Ruskin himself. In his eyes the villa—that is to say, the country—stands for truth and righteousness, for all that is highest and holiest in public and private life.

"What man is there who does not find joy and happiness in the villa?" he asks. "The villa is always gracious and faithful and true. If you govern her

<sup>1</sup> *Cronica di Buonaccorso Pitti*, p. 112.



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wisely and well she will never fail to satisfy you and will always add gift to gift. In spring the villa affords endless delights—green leaves, flowers, sweet scents, songs of birds—and does her utmost to make you glad and joyous. The world smiles on you; there is good promise of a rich harvest, you are filled with hope, with mirth and gaiety. And then how courteous the villa becomes, sending you one fruit after another, never leaving the barn empty. In autumn her rewards are out of all proportion to your labours; she gives you back twelve for one, for a little toil many barrels of wine, and for what is old, things new and good. She fills the house with fresh and dried grapes, walnuts, figs, pears, almonds, filberts, pomegranates, with sweet and luscious apples, and other wholesome fruits. Nor does she forget to be liberal in winter, supplying you with oil and wood, with vine-tendrils, laurel and juniper boughs, to shelter you from snow and wind, and kindle a fragrant and cheerful flame on the hearth. And if you please to stay with her, the villa will gladden you with splendid sunshine and give you fine sport in chasing the hare, the stag, and the wild boar. What need I say more? It would be hard to tell all that the villa does for the family's health and comfort. And the wise have always held that the villa is the refuge of good, just and temperate men, yielding them gain together with pleasant amusement. There you may enjoy clear, brilliant days and beautiful prospects over wooded hills and sunlit plains, and listen to the murmuring of fountains and of the running streams that flow through the tufted grass. What is still better, there you can escape from the noise and tumult of the city, the turmoils of the Piazza and the

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Palace. O blessed country life, how untold are your joys!"<sup>1</sup>

So Leo Battista Alberti, the greatest prose writer of the age, sings the praises of the simple life. His words recall many a plain white-washed villa of the fifteenth century which is still to be found hidden among the olive-woods round Florence, with a clump of cypresses by the gateway and a hedge of roses and blue iris along the path where the young wheat is sprouting in the furrow.

The Italians, like the old Romans, were always careful to discriminate between the *Villa Urbana* and *Rustica*, the one a palatial building in the city or its immediate neighbourhood, the other a modest, oblong house with broad eaves and square tower, half farm and half fortress—the *podere* or *vigna* of the landlord who spends six months of the year on his estates. On one occasion, indeed, an animated debate was held in the Roman Academy as to the different meaning of the words *villa* and *vigna*, and the philosophers who discussed the question finally decided that their significance was precisely the same. But whether the villa stood in the city or country, the garden was always treated as an integral part of the house, a place to be lived in, which must be adapted to the architectural design of the building as well as to the require-

<sup>1</sup> *Del Governo della Famiglia*, p. 109.



*Photo: Alinari, Florence*

THE VILLA RUSTICA  
(Villa Salviati)



## GARDENS OF FLORENTINE HUMANISTS

ments of its inhabitants. It was in the age of the Medici, when Pandolfini lived and Alberti wrote, that garden-design became a fine art and individual culture and character found expression in the creation of the countless pleasure-houses that are scattered over the Tuscan hills. In 1417 Cosimo de' Medici bought the estate of Careggi, two miles north-west of the city, and employed Michelozzo to design the house and grounds—"a thing," says Vasari, "truly rich and magnificent," as well as to bring water for the fountain that may still be seen in the garden. This villa, with the covered galleries under the roof and the frescoed loggia, looking over the ilex-woods towards the sunset, remained the favourite home of the Medici during three generations, and was enlarged and beautified by each successive owner. Here Cosimo Pater Patriae dined on the memorable day when he returned to Florence in triumph, bringing with him the faithful architect who had shared his exile. In this villa, which he called the place on earth nearest to heaven, he spent the happiest hours of his life, studying Plato and discussing philosophy with Marsilio Ficino, for whom he built the villa of "La Fontanella," close by.

"Yesterday I arrived at Careggi," he wrote to Ficino, "not so much with the object of improving my gardens as myself. Let me see you, Marsilio, as soon as possible, and do not forget to bring with you the book

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of our friend Plato—*De summo bono*—which I hope you have by this time translated into Latin, for there is nothing that I desire so ardently as to find out the true road to happiness. Come then and fail not to bring with you the lyre of Orpheus.”<sup>1</sup>

Here in April 1459, when Cosimo was too infirm to leave the Via Larga, his sons entertained young Galeazzo Maria Sforza, who was sent by his august father, Francesco, Duke of Milan, to meet Pope Pius II.

“Yesterday,” the boy wrote home to his parents, “I went to Careggi, a most beautiful palace belonging to Cosimo, and was shown all over the place, and was no less delighted with the gardens, which are altogether enchanting, than with the noble building, which is certainly one of the finest houses in this city, when you consider the halls, bedrooms, kitchens, and furniture.”<sup>2</sup>

Galeazzo proceeds to describe the banquet at which he was entertained by Piero de’ Medici and the chief members of his family, all saving Cosimo’s handsome son Giovanni, who refused to sit down, and himself insisted on waiting on the guests. A young Tuscan poet, Antonio Cammelli of Pistoja, chanted a poem in praise of the Sforza’s great deeds to the music of his lute, after which the Medici ladies and Marietta Strozzi, whose bust was carved by Desiderio da Settignano, and

<sup>1</sup> M. Ficini, *Ep.* i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds italien, 1588.

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whom Galeazzo calls the loveliest maiden in Florence, joined in country dances with the peasant girls of Careggi. Altogether it was a memorable afternoon, and one that the young Sforza prince could not easily forget.

Cafaggiuolo was another villa which Michelozzo built for Cosimo on a spur of the Apennines in Val Mugello, eighteen miles from the town. Vasari describes this as a castle with moat and drawbridge, built for defence, but surrounded with ilex-woods, gardens, fountains, aviaries, and all that makes a villa fair and pleasant. To-day Cafaggiuolo still retains its massive tower and machicolated walls, although the moat and bridges are gone and the grass grows up to the doors. But according to Messer Giorgio, Michelozzo's masterpiece was the villa which he built for Cosimo's younger son, Giovanni, on the steep hill of Fiesole. Here he had to contend with the natural difficulties of the site, but even these the great architect turned to advantage, raising huge buttresses against the hillside, and having stables, cellars, and storehouses cut out of the rock, on which he erected "fair halls and saloons for music and books." "And so great was his skill," adds Vasari, "that in spite of the exposed situation of the house no crack has ever been seen in the walls."

Cosimo's grandsons, Lorenzo and Giuliano, spent

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much of their boyhood in Cafaggiuolo. Here they were sent when the plague was raging in Florence and their grandfather was dying at Careggi, and here after his death they often spent the summer with the widowed Monna Contessina. The boys, as the *fattore* told their father, had a happy time, riding, fishing, shooting, and visiting different parts of the estate. Lorenzo, it appears, already showed a taste for gardening, and asked Piero's leave to lay out the rough ground in front of the villa. And it was at a village fair in the neighbourhood of Cafaggiuolo that he met the peasant girl who became the heroine of his rustic idyll, Nencia da Barberino. From the first a genuine love of nature inspired his youthful sonnets and canzoni. He describes the ilex-woods and rippling streams, the song of the nightingales in the thicket, the *belle, fresche e purpuree viole* in the grass and the red and white rosebuds of the gardens. A sunflower on the terraces of Careggi filled him with tender musings on the death of the fair Simonetta, and his mistress Lucrezia first appeared to him, like Botticelli's Venus, in a shower of roses. The simple joys of rural life, the calm repose of the villa, and the beauty of trees and flowers are themes of which he never tires. Let others seek the stately halls and busy marts of the city, the games and pleasures which bring with them a thousand vexing cares. All he asks for is a little



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green meadow full of flowers, a rivulet murmuring in the grass, and a single bird pouring out its love-song in the hedge.

Lorenzo's friend, Angelo Poliziano, weaves the same thoughts into still sweeter verse. For delicate charm and grace no poem of the century equals his Ballata "I' mi trovai, fanciulle, un bel mattino,"<sup>1</sup> in which, forestalling our English poet, he bids fair maidens "gather the roses while they may."

"Sicchè, fanciulle, mentre è più fiorita,  
Cogliam la bella rosa del giardino."

Poliziano was the most distinguished of all the brilliant circle which flourished "in the balmy airs of Careggi as in the shade of the Elysian myrtles." His fame drew visitors from all parts of Italy, and his poetic gifts were in constant requisition.

"Does a man want a motto for a sword-hilt," he writes from Fiesole to his friend Donato, "a posy for a ring, a device for his bed, his plate, or even his pots and pans, he runs like all the world to Poliziano. There is hardly a wall that I have not besmeared, like a snail, with the effusions of my brain. One man teases me for a glee or a drinking song, another asks for a grave discourse, a third begs for a serenade, a fourth for a carnival ballad."

---

<sup>1</sup> "I went a roaming, maiden, one bright day,  
In a green garden, in mid month of May."

J. A. SYMONDS.

## ITALIAN GARDENS OF THE RENAISSANCE

Lorenzo made Poliziano tutor to his sons, bidding him not only teach them Greek and Latin, but infuse them with his own love of Nature. Accordingly he set the boys themes on rural subjects, and took them to visit all the gardens in the neighbourhood. But the poet was not always easy to live with. When Lorenzo was absent, and it rained every day at Careggi, Messer Angelo fretted and fumed and quarrelled with Madonna Clarice until she declared his presence to be intolerable. Then Lorenzo sent him to Fiesole, where he wrote his *Rusticus*, and consoled himself with the company of Pico della Mirandola, the accomplished youth whom Poliziano called "the Phœnix who nested in the Medici laurel." Pico was often the guest of the brothers Benivieni, whose villa "Le Querce" was just across the valley, while Ficino spent much of his time at the villa Marmigliana at Maiano and finished his translation of Plato there in 1480. Together the three humanists strolled along these pleasant hills, visiting the home of Boccaccio, and the Valley of his Fair Ladies, and hearing from Girolamo Benivieni of his friend, the great Friar-preacher, who had persuaded him to leave off writing carnival songs, and compose hymns for the children of San Marco.

There is a delightful letter, in which Poliziano begs Marsilio Ficino to join him at the Medici villa.

## GARDENS OF FLORENTINE HUMANISTS

“When the summer heat becomes too great at Careggi, do not fail to seek our Fiesolan villa. There is abundance of water here, and, as we are on the edge of a valley, but little sun, and the wind is certainly never lacking. The villa itself lies off the road, in a dense wood, but commands a view of the whole city, and although the district is thickly populated I enjoy that solitude dear to those who have fled from town. More than this, I have a double attraction to offer. Often Pico, appearing unexpectedly from his oak-woods, drags me out of these shades to share his supper. This, as you know, is frugal but sufficient, well seasoned with pleasant conversation and jests. But come and be my guest, and your supper shall be as good and your wine perhaps better. For in this I will venture to dispute the prize with Pico.”<sup>1</sup>

Lorenzo made many improvements in the gardens at Careggi, collecting all manner of rare plants and exotics and adorning them with fine bronzes, such as the superb statue of David and the beautiful fountain with the boy strangling a dolphin, by Andrea Verrocchio, which are now in Florence. Not content with the villas erected by Cosimo, in 1485 he employed Giuliano di Sangallo to build him a new country house at Poggio à Caiano, on the banks of the Ombrone, half-way between Florence and Pistoia. The grand double flight of steps leading to the upper loggia and the vaulted hall, which Vasari calls the loftiest he had ever seen,

<sup>1</sup> A. Poliziano, *Opere*, p. 135.

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are still standing. The charming frescoes on the walls were painted by Andrea del Sarto and his scholars to commemorate the gifts of parrots, apes, and other animals that were presented to the Magnifico in 1488 by the Sultan of Babylon, and placed in the menagerie at Poggio. Among these was a giraffe which excited so much interest that it was sent round to the convents to gratify the curiosity of the nuns. "The creature will eat anything," writes Tribaldo de' Rossi. "It pokes its nose into every peasant's basket, and is so gentle that it will take an apple from a child's hand. But it died on January 2, and everybody was sorry for the beautiful spotted giraffe."<sup>1</sup>

The vast gardens which Lorenzo laid out on the ground sloping down to the river, the orchards and mulberry trees which he planted in order to encourage the silk trade, and the woods which he stocked with peacocks and pheasants, quails and waterfowl, have been described by Michele Verini in prose and by Poliziano in verse. But in spite of the strong dykes that were built to protect the gardens from the winter floods, one day the Ombrone broke its banks, and swept away the islet which Lorenzo had planted with rare herbs and trees. Like a true humanist, he consoled himself for this disaster by writing an Ovidian poem, in which he describes how Ambra, the loveliest of

<sup>1</sup> D. Salvi. (Domenici, 247.)

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Caiano's nymphs, fled from the embraces of the river-god Ombrone, and was turned into a rock by the goddess Diana.

In his later years, the Magnifico employed Sangallo to build yet another villa at Lo Spedaletto on the heights near Volterra, where he spent the autumn months in the hope that the mountain air might benefit his failing health. There Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and Filippino decorated the hall with paintings of Lorenzo's favourite Greek myths, and traces of colour may still be seen on a loggia in the garden. But of all these villas, Careggi is the one most closely associated with Lorenzo's memory. Here every year, on the birthday of Plato, he gave a banquet to the Florentine Academy, and it was here, like his grandfather, that he died.

Seldom have comfort and splendour, richness and simplicity, the beauties of Art and Nature, been more happily combined than in these villas, where Lorenzo, himself the most perfect of hosts, entertained the foremost scholars of the age, where Pulci recited romances from his *Morgante* for the amusement of Monna Lucrezia, and the witty chaplain Matteo Franco delighted and annoyed the guests by turn with his sallies. Many of the city gardens were also intimately associated with the life of its humanists. Lorenzo adorned the gardens of his palace in the Via Larga with excellent paintings and antique marbles, and threw them open to artists

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and students. Here Poliziano and Pico discoursed of classical myths and Greek ideals, and Botticelli and the young Michelangelo studied bas-reliefs and sarcophagi in the myrtle groves and cypress avenues under the shadow of San Marco. The members of the Academy often met in the Oricellari gardens, beyond Santa Maria Novella, where, in later days, Machiavelli fired the patriotic enthusiasm of the young Florentines with his lectures on Roman heroes, and Giovanni Rucellai's play, *Rosmunda*, was acted in the presence of Pope Leo the Tenth.

All over the hills near Florence villas sprang up, built by the friends and kinsfolk of the Medici on these delicious sites, "where," in Messer Agnolo's words, "the air is pure as crystal, and the views are divinely beautiful, where there are few fogs and no bitter winds, but all things are good and wholesome."<sup>1</sup> The Tornabuoni had their country house at Chiasso Macerelli, between Careggi and Fiesole. Here Piero de' Medici met and courted Lucrezia Tornabuoni, the admirable mother who was the object of the Magnifico's love and reverence, and here one summer day in 1486 young Lorenzo, the hope of the family, led home Giovanna degli Albizzi, the fairest maiden in Florence, as his bride. Ghirlandaio painted Giovanna's portrait, and Botticelli decorated the *pian nobile* of the villa with two famous frescoes

<sup>1</sup> *Del Governo della Famiglia*, 105.

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representing the Graces doing homage to the bride, while her accomplished husband, "the friend of all the Muses," is welcomed by the Arts and Sciences. To-day Sandro's frescoes hang on the staircase of the Louvre, and Ghirlandaio's portrait of the lovely maiden, a masterpiece of Florentine art, is the pride of Mr. Pierpont Morgan's library at New York. Only the old white house remains, with the square tower and pillared loggia, and a doorway with the Tornabuoni arms carved in stone amid a tangled thicket of roses and jessamine.

At the foot of Monte Morello, two miles beyond Careggi, stood another country house closely connected with a younger branch of the Medici. This was the beautiful villa of Castello, built, says Vasari, "with rare skill by Cosimo's nephew, Pier Francesco." In front of the house was a wide lawn with tanks of water divided by clipped hedges and long avenues of mulberry-trees leading down to the Arno, while behind, the gardens were laid out in terraces, adorned with statues and fountains, against the steep hillside. Castello was the scene of many brilliant festivities in the days of Pier Francesco's son Lorenzo, the intimate friend of Poliziano and patron of Botticelli. For him Sandro painted those great pictures of "Primavera" and the "Birth of Venus," in which the humanists' love of old myths and delight in the joyous May-time alike

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find expression, and which in Vasari's time still hung on the villa walls. It was to Castello that Caterina Sforza, the heroic Madonna of Forli, came to end her days after her cruel captivity in Rome, while her little son, afterwards the great captain, Giovanni *delle bande Nere*, was kept in hiding and brought up in girl's clothes by the good nuns of Annalena. Giovanni's son Cosimo became the first Grand Duke of Florence, and employed Buontalenti and Tribolo to lay out the gardens of Castello on a grander scale and adorn them with the splendid fountains, the grottoes, and labyrinths which excited the admiration of Montaigne and Evelyn. The sister villa of Petraja, which stands a mile off at the other end of an ilex-wood, originally belonged to the Brunelleschi and Strozzi families, and still retains its ancient tower, but was confiscated by Cosimo de' Medici after the rebellion of Filippo Strozzi, and became this prince's favourite residence. Another house which, with its strong walls and towers, bears a marked resemblance to Careggi, is Villa Salviati. It was the residence of this family for three hundred and fifty years, and the lovely terraced gardens looking towards Fiesole were laid out by Jacopo Salviati, the son-in-law of Lorenzo de' Medici, whose daughter Maria married Giovanni *delle bande Nere*, and became the mother of the first Tuscan Grand Duke.

Another kinsman of the Medici, Giovanni Rucellai,



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the fine old citizen who thanked God that he was born in the days of Cosimo, built a villa at Quaracchi, which he spared no pains or expense to beautify. His son married Lorenzo's sister Nannina, and his grandson Giovanni, who was Castellan of Sant' Angelo in the reign of Leo the Tenth, wrote a charming poem on the bees—"Le Api"—in which he describes this beloved country house. The poet dwells fondly on his recollections of the delicious spot, and recalls the whispering reeds in the pool, the bees and butterflies gathering honey from lilies and roses, the goats feeding in the meadow and the swallows circling in the air, the clear stream and grassy lawns, for which he sighed in the hot summer months. But he died in Rome a year afterwards, and never saw Quaracchi again.

Many of these gardens have perished altogether, and those which remained were for the most part transformed into sumptuous pleasure-houses in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. But all alike were modelled on the plan of Pliny's Tuscan villa, with a portico opening on the *xystus* or terrace, walls bordered with clipped box or ilex hedges leading to grassy lawns adorned with fountains and marble seats. The view from the house or terrace was always a special feature. The site of the house was chosen chiefly for the sake of the prospect, whether, as at Castello and Poggio à Caiano, you looked out on

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grassy lawns and clear pools, or, as at Fiesole and Poggio Gherardo, you saw all Valdarno lying at your feet, with the mountains of Carrara in the distance and the domes and towers of Florence rising out of the violet haze. The landscape formed an important part of the garden and was included in the general composition. Cypress and ilex avenues made fine perspectives along the hillside; the beauty of distant peaks and far blue plains was heightened by the over-arching trees that framed in the vista. Close to the house lay the *Giardino segreto*, well shut in by clipped hedges of ilex or laurel—a little garden with sunny walks for winter days and a *bosco* to afford a retreat from the noonday sun, a lawn with a fountain in the centre and a sunk parterre filled with roses and pinks. Lilies and sunflowers in big marble or terra-cotta vases might be placed along the balustrade of the retaining wall, and roses and jessamine were grown on trellis-work or allowed to wander at will over the low stone parapet. But few flowers, as a rule, we suspect, were to be found in Renaissance gardens. Herein, as Sir William Temple remarks, lies the great difference between English and Italian gardens.

“In the warmer regions, fruits and flowers of the best sort are so common and so easy of production that they grow in the fields and are not worth the cost of enclosing, or the care of more than ordinary

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cultivation. On the other side, the great pleasures of these countries are coolness of air and whatever looks cool even to the eyes, and relieves them from the unpleasant sight of dusty streets and parched fields. This makes the gardens of those countries to be chiefly valued by largeness of extent, which gives greater play and openness of air, by shades of trees, by frequency of living streams or fountains, by perspectives, by statues, and by pillars and obelisks of stone, scattered up and down, which all conspire to make any place look fresh and cool. We, on the contrary, are careless of shade and seldom curious in fountains. Good statues are in the reach of few men, and common ones are greatly despised and neglected.”<sup>1</sup>

Shade, no doubt, was one of the chief requirements of Italian gardens. A wood was always planted near the house, and ilex-groves and tunnels of pleached and knotted trees afforded a soft twilight on blazing August days. The perennial verdure of cypress and pine, ilex and box was invaluable in the winter months, while in spring and summer it formed a pleasant contrast to the lighter foliage of elm and plane, of orange and citron trees. Grottoes, with marble basins, in which the water trickled over beds of moss and maidenhair, supplied a cool retreat in the hot season, and were prominent features in the ducal gardens of Castello and Boboli. The pleasant sound of falling water and murmuring streams was

<sup>1</sup> Temple, *Works*, iii. 217.

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indispensable to perfect enjoyment. A fountain, as Crescenzi writes, is necessary to the smallest garden. Michelozzo and his brother architects built aqueducts and brought water from the Arno and Mugnone to supply the fountains of the Medici villas, and the best sculptors of the day, from Verrocchio to Tribolo, lavished their skill and ingenuity on the bronze and marble *putti* and colossal figures which adorned them. Statues, again, were a decorative element of which the Florentine garden-architect made extensive use. At first a few antique busts were placed along the parapet of the terrace or under the central loggia. But, ere long, Greek gods and heroes, fauns and naiads were seen at the end of every alley, while giants and caryatides were introduced to support walls and porticoes.

One great charm of Renaissance gardens was the skilful manner in which Nature and Art were blended together. The formal design of the *giardino segreto* agreed with the straight lines of the house, and the walls, with their clipped hedges, led on to the wilder, freer growth of woodland and meadow, while the dense shade of the *bosco* supplied an effective contrast to the sunny spaces of lawn and flower-bed. The ancient practice of cutting box-trees into fantastic shapes, known to the Romans as the topiary art, was largely restored in the fifteenth century and

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became an essential part of Italian gardens. In that strange romance printed at the Aldine Press in 1499, the *Hypernotomachia* of Francesco Colonna, Polyphilus and his beloved are led through an enchanted garden, where banquet-houses, temples, and statues stand in the midst of myrtle groves and labyrinths on the banks of a shining stream. The pages of this curious book are adorned with a profusion of woodcuts, by some Venetian engraver, representing pergolas, fountains, sunk parterres, pillared *loggie*, clipped box and ilex trees of every variety, which give a good idea of the garden-architecture then in vogue.

Many other delightful pictures of Tuscan gardens are to be found in the works of contemporary painters. Everyone who has visited the Campo Santo of Pisa will remember the gay knights and ladies seated on the grassy bank under the orange-groves in the famous fresco of the "Triumph of Death," and Puccio's "Garden of Eden," with the rose-trellis and fruit trees, the song birds, and marble fountain adorned with lions' heads. In the cells of San Marco, Fra Angelico shows us the Magdalen and her risen Lord walking in a garden planted with olive, cypress, and palm, and the Archangel bending before the lowly Virgin in a loggia opening on the convent garden, where pinks and daisies flower in the grass, and rose-bushes and cypresses rise behind the wooden paling.

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Again, in the paintings of that devout *Piagnone* artist, Lorenzo di Credi, we are allowed charming glimpses of formal gardens with broad walks and ilex avenues on the banks of running streams. Botticelli thrones his Madonna in a bower of palm and olive, cypress and myrtle, with tall white lilies and red and white roses standing in bowls along the marble parapet, and places the Court of Venus in a woodland glade where the Graces dance hand in hand on the flowery turf.

But of all these old Florentines, none took greater delight in rural scenes than Fra Angelico's pupil, Benozzo Gozzoli. In the Campo Santo of Pisa this excellent artist painted a whole series of Tuscan landscapes as a setting for the history of the patriarchs, to the great admiration of his contemporaries. The Tower of Babel rears its lofty pile among terraced gardens and blossoming orchards; youths and maidens pluck the purple grapes from the pergola over Noah's head; while the Renaissance portico, where St. Augustine teaches rhetoric, opens on a hillside crowned with smiling villa-gardens. Still more to Benozzo's taste was the task of painting the walls of the Medici chapel in Via Larga which Cosimo's son Piero gave him in 1459. Here he had to commemorate the Council of Florence and introduce portraits of the Greek Emperor and Patriarch, of Cosimo and his

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family, in one great fresco of the Adoration of the Magi. All through the summer months, while most people were taking their ease in *villeggiatura*, Benozzo toiled to satisfy the great man at Careggi, who called him his *amico singularissimo*. The heat was intense that August, and the precious ultramarine melted so fast that the painter dared not leave his work for a moment, even to go to Careggi. But sometimes of an evening Piero would ride in to the city to see the fresco, and offer a suggestion or make some criticism.

“I am working with all my might,” wrote Benozzo to him, “and if I fail it will be from lack of knowledge, not from want of zeal. God knows I have no other thought in my heart but how best to perfect my work and satisfy your wishes.”

On the chapel walls he set forth the great procession winding its way across the Apennines, the Three Kings and their glittering train in all the bravery of rich attire and gallant bearing, with the white-walled villas and bell-towers peeping out of the olive-woods behind them. But he filled the sanctuary with troops of bright angelic beings, with flower-like faces and rainbow wings, chanting Glorias or kneeling in adoration at the manger of Bethlehem. And in the background, instead of rugged Apennines and wooded hillside, he painted stone pines and cypresses, growing tall and straight against the sky, a trellis laden with

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roses and clusters of ripe pomegranates, blue-breasted peacocks trailing their starry plumes over green lawns and marble balustrades, and angels tending the flowers of this new Eden, or dancing forward with their lap full of roses. It is the garden of Careggi transformed into a vision of Paradise.



## THE GARDENS OF ESTE AND GONZAGA PRINCES

"Bel paese è Lombardia,  
Degno assai, ricca e galante."

GASPARO VISCONTI.

THE gardens of North Italy, in the days of the Renaissance, were especially famous. This was, no doubt, in a great measure owing to the abundance of water and consequent fertility of the soil. Castiglione, in the letters which he sent to his mother at Mantua, constantly alludes to the barren nature of the ground at Urbino, and remarks that even in the more fruitful province of Pesaro nothing grows as it does "at home with us in Lombardy," a name commonly applied to the whole district north of the Apennines. But the beauty of the gardens in North Italy was also largely due to the number of princes who held their courts in this favoured region. Milan, Ferrara, Mantua, Bologna, Carpi, Correggio, and Forli, were all the seats of reigning families, whose courts were centres of light and learning, and whose homes were adorned with all that was fairest in art and nature.

Chief among these was the house of Este, the oldest

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and most beloved of all the dynasties that held sway between the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. It was a common saying that three ruling passions—the love of building, of travel, and of theatricals—distinguished all the members of the ducal family. In those days the art of building, as we have seen, included the laying out of the gardens, an object that was held worthy to occupy the attention of the best architects. Accordingly, the sumptuous pleasure-houses and delicious gardens which sprang up all round Ferrara in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were among the most remarkable features of the golden age when the white eagle of Este floated from the towers of the Castello Vecchio. If no other record of these vanished palaces remained, the works of Boiardo and Ariosto would show how great a part they played in that court life which is so vividly reflected in the verses of these poets. The gardens of Belfiore and the Schifanoia, of Belriguardo and Belvedere, were the scene of those manifold pageants and festivities that were held in honour of illustrious guests, or of births and marriages in the ducal family, and helped to make each incident in the Prince's private life a memorable event in the history of his people. These wide terraces, flanked with loggias and adorned with marble fountains and statues, these grassy lawns surrounded with hedges of box and laurel, with groves of ilex and cypress, afforded



*Photo: Alinari, Firenze*

## A PALACE GARDEN

(Palazzo Pitti)



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an admirable setting for the pastoral plays and tournaments, the banquets and dances, which lent so much romance and charm to daily existence.

The three sons of Niccolò d'Este, who reigned in turn over Ferrara in the fifteenth century, were all men of culture. Leonello, the pupil of the learned humanist Guarino, and the friend of Alberti and Pisanello, was that rare being who, in the eyes of his contemporaries, fulfilled Plato's ideal of the philosopher upon the throne. During the nine years of his wise and peaceful rule this gentle Prince made great improvements both in his town house and in his villa of Belfiore without the walls. He planted a fair garden under the windows of his study in the Corte Vecchia with white lilies and dark cypresses, with roses, myrtles, and violets, as well as fruit trees bearing sweet apples and lemons, "which he liked for their bitter taste." Here, in the rooms hung with the portraits of Roman heroes, including that of Julius Cæsar, which the painter Pisanello gave him as a wedding present, the little band of humanists whom Leonello had brought to lecture at the University met to hear the wisdom of Guarino or to discuss the latest codex which the Marquis had acquired for his library. On summer evenings Leonello would walk to Belfiore with his friends or ride out under the stars to his more distant villa at Belriguardo, discussing the story of Cato's death or

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Cæsar's campaigns, and taking a small volume of Sallust for reference in his pocket.<sup>1</sup>

As the circle of humanists at his Court grew larger these meetings were generally held at Belfiore, under the spreading boughs of a laurel tree in the garden or else in the sunny rooms which he had built on the south side of the house for use in winter, and adorned with choice pictures and antique marbles.

The artists whose works Leonello admired the most were those who reproduced natural beauty the most closely. The triptych by the Flemish master, Rogier van der Weyden, which hung in his cabinet, contained a picture of Adam and Eve, in which the hills, meadows, and streams of the Garden of Eden were all painted "with marvellous fidelity." His favourite painter, Pisanello, was noted, as Guarino says in his verses, for the "wonderful felicity with which he renders the delicate hues of the spring foliage, the sunlit slopes of the hills, the birds whose voices fill the air with song." Whole sheets covered with studies of roses and grasses by the hand of the Veronese master are still preserved in the Louvre and confirm the truth of the old humanist's words. Pisanello's noble profile of Leonello himself, in the Morelli Gallery at Bergamo, has a background of exquisite wild roses, while his portrait of the Marquis's sister, Ginevra, the hapless bride of Sigismondo Malatesta, is adorned with

<sup>1</sup> A. Decembrio, *Politix Litterariæ*, i. 3, ii. 30.

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a bower of pinks and columbines, where red admiral and swallow-tail butterflies flit to and fro, and a sprig of juniper on the lady's shoulder denotes her name.

Leonello's brothers shared his love of art if they hardly equalled him in devotion to learning. Borso, who first bore the title of Duke, completed the Schifanoia Palace begun by his grandfather, and employed Cossa and his followers to paint the interior with frescoes of the months and seasons. The low red-brick house is still standing among the fruit trees at the end of the grass-grown street, with Borso's unicorn on the marble portal and his brother Ercole's diamond wrought in the terra-cotta frieze. Within are the faded and half-effaced pictures which tell of life in the court and camp, in the town and countryside. The Duke is there, magnificent in cloth of gold, riding out to the chase, administering justice to his subjects and looking on with courtiers and ladies at the famous races that were run for the Palio on St. George's Day. We see the peasant at work in the harvest and vintage, the merchant at the counter, the scholar at his books, women bending over the embroidery loom, youths and maidens playing viols and whispering together among the pomegranate trees on the flowery grass where the rabbits are at play, while Venus drives her chariot drawn by swans under a blue sky flecked with soft white clouds. A scene in which the Duke was represented receiving a basket of cherries from a child has

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completely disappeared, but another remains in which he is seen, with a kindly smile on his face, giving a piece of gold to his pet dwarf.

The Schifanoia frescoes were the glory of Borso's reign, but Duke Ercole was the great builder who made Ferrara the finest city in North Italy. Soon after his accession, he sent to ask Lorenzo de' Medici for a copy of Alberti's *Treatise on Architecture*, and carried out his improvements on the principles laid down by the great writer. The stately symmetry of the well-kept streets and wide squares, the fine palaces standing in their blossoming gardens, were the admiration of every visitor to Ferrara. It was Ercole who laid out the *delizie*, or gardens, of the Schifanoia, where his son Alfonso was born in July 1476.

"A beautiful fête," writes the Ferrarese chronicler, "was given in honour of the child's christening. A hundred trumpeters, pipers, and tambourine-players made music, and the tables of the Sala Grande were decked with a splendid display of *confetti* representing lords and ladies, castles, trees, and animals in gilt and coloured sugar. But as soon as the palace doors were opened, the people rushed in and carried off everything, leaving the board bare."<sup>1</sup>

The Schifanoia Gardens were the scene of another brilliant *festa* in the following summer, when Ercole

<sup>1</sup> *Diario Ferrarese*, p. 250. (Muratori, xxiv.)



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entertained his future son-in-law, Lodovico Sforza, and his two brothers, and two blind poets sang and played the lyre while the Duke and his guests were at supper in the loggia.

In these early years Ercole built the grand marble stairway of the Corte Vecchia, one of the few memorials of his reign still in existence, and laid out the Barco and Barchetto. The Barchetto was a wooded enclosure to the east of the villa of Belfiore, with a round fish-pond and marble loggia, surrounded by tall poplars and fruit trees, which no one might touch without incurring heavy penalties. The laying out of the vast hunting ground known as the Barco involved the destruction of many houses and churches between the north wall of the city and the banks of the Po. This New Forest of the Este princes was peopled with stags, gazelles, antelopes, and wild boars, as well as with the leopards and spotted giraffes to which Niccolò da Correggio alludes in his fable of *Psyche*. During the war of 1482, when the Duke lay ill in the Castello, the Venetian invaders planted the banner of St. Mark in the Barco, killed the deer and peacocks, and carried off the giraffes and leopards to Venice. It was a terrible moment in the history of Ferrara. But when peace was restored a new era of prosperity dawned, and Ercole returned to his favourite pursuits with fresh vigour. "The Duke," complained one of his subjects, "thinks of nothing but the embel-

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lishment of this his city of Ferrara and the building of new palaces.”<sup>1</sup>

The excellent Duchess Leonora, born and bred in the sunny gardens of Naples, shared her lord's tastes and took especial delight in beautifying the grounds of the Castello, now the chief ducal residence. On the banks of the moat, close to the Gate of the Lions, was the Garden of the Padiglione, so called from the marble pavilion supported by pillars which stood on a mount planted with pergolas of vines and roses. Farther westward was the Duchess's Casino, with its marble baths and halls painted by Ercole Roberti, standing in a parterre of flowers set round with thick box hedges. Here was the beautiful fountain adorned with richly carved marbles upon which Duke Ercole had bestowed infinite thought and pains. He even wrote to ask Count Matteo Boiardo for his advice on the subject, but the poet replied that his wife was ill and his imagination ill-disposed for such matters and could only refer him to Alberti's *Trattato*.<sup>2</sup> Here, too, under the city walls, were the kitchen gardens and orchards, a plantation of orange and lemon trees rarely seen in these parts, known as “La Cedraia,” and a thick ilex-wood where nightingales sang on the summer nights and rare birds of bright plumage sought shelter in the shade. Ercole's

<sup>1</sup> Frizzi, *Storia di Ferrara*, iv. 148.

<sup>2</sup> *Lettere edite e inedite*, N. Campanini, 393.

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son, the warlike Alfonso the First, built the new pleasure-house, called "La Castellina" from its castellated walls, in this corner of the grounds near the ramparts, and planted a triangle with pergolas of quince and cherry, plum and pear trees, and avenues of elm and cypress all converging to a central point. His grandson, another Alfonso, added a marble flight of steps leading from the Casino to the Peschiera, a large pond encircled with a pillared balustrade, where fish darted to and fro under the crystal waters and rose to the surface at the sound of a tinkling bell to be fed by the Duchess and her ladies.<sup>1</sup>

In his later years, when Duke Ercole laid out the new district known as the Addizione Erculea to the north of the old town, he planted double avenues of elms along the ramparts which enclosed the Certosa and villa of Belfiore, thus clothing the bastions for the defence of the city with beautiful verdure. At the same time he added a splendid chapel and frescoed halls to the palace of Belriguardo, which was said to contain as many rooms as days of the year, while the gardens, with their wealth of statuesque fountains and skilfully planned perspectives commanding superb views of the plains and river Po, were celebrated throughout Italy. When, in the summer of 1493, Lodovico Sforza visited Ferrara with his wife and child, he was enchanted with this villa, and

<sup>1</sup> M. A. Guarini, *Compendio storico di chiese di Ferrara*, pp. 57-59.

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declared it to be the most beautiful which he had ever seen. One May evening, after the young Duchess Beatrice and her mother had left for Venice, Ercole took his son-in-law to spend the day at Belriguardo, and entertained him and his Milanese courtiers at a banquet in the gardens.

"I would not for all the world," wrote the Moro to his wife, "have missed seeing this place. For, in truth, I have never seen so large and fine a house and gardens, or one that is so well laid out and adorned with such excellent paintings. I do not believe there is such another villa in the whole world, at once so noble and spacious, and at the same time so thoroughly well-planned and comfortable. To say the truth, if I were asked to decide whether Vigevano, the Castello of Pavia, or this house were the finest palace in the world, the Castello must forgive me, for I would certainly choose Belriguardo." <sup>1</sup>

But even the splendours of Belriguardo paled by the side of the new palace of Belvedere which Alfonso the First reared twenty years later on an island in the Po, just above the ancient fortress of Castel Tedaldo. A flight of marble stairs led from the water's edge to a court turfed with the finest grass, surrounded by cut box hedges, with a superb fountain in the centre. Facing this grassy court stood the villa, an imposing building with porticos and colonnade flanked by lofty

<sup>1</sup> E. Motta, *Giornale st. d. lett. ital.*, vii. 387.

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towers. Within, a marble atrium, painted by Dossi with cupids and nymphs, opened into saloons decorated with frescoes or hung with tapestries. On the other side of the house, between the Duke's private rooms and the chapel, was the *giardino segreto*, a sunk parterre with the usual low box hedges, where rare flowers and fruits were cultivated and the water of countless *jets d'eau* splashed into marble basins supported by *putti* and dolphins. Beyond this was a menagerie filled with elephants, ostriches, and other rare animals, and orchards and ilex woods growing down to the riverside. Here this soldier Duke, whose whole reign was one long struggle with three successive Popes, loved to spend his brief intervals of peace and leisure, saying in the motto inscribed on his mantelpiece that he was "never less alone than when alone."<sup>1</sup>

Soon the fame of this enchanted palace became the theme of every Court poet. Ariosto, in his *Orlando*, sang the praises of the joyous isle throned on the bosom of the king of rivers, the "*bel loco*" whose fruits are fairer than the apples of the Hesperides, and whose herds outnumber the flocks of Circe's fold. Giulio Cesare Scaligero wrote a poem called *Elysium* dedicated to Alfonso's sister, Isabella d'Este, describing this terrestrial paradise, and Tasso celebrated "*la vaga isoletta*" both in his sonnets and in his *Aminta*. It was

<sup>1</sup> E. Gruyer, *L'art ferrarais*, i. 473.

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to the Belvedere that Alfonso's son, Ercole the Second, brought his bride, Renée de France, to spend the night before she made her triumphal entry into Ferrara. The rejoicings that day were worthy of a king's daughter, and when the bride set foot on the deck of the *Bucentaur*, the sound of the Duke's famous guns was heard as far as Bologna.

But the most brilliant *fête* held in Renée's honour was that which Monsignore Ippolito, the young Archbishop and future Cardinal, gave his sister-in-law at the villa of Belfiore. After partaking of the most delicate viands and sweetmeats, Renée and her ladies fell to dancing, an accomplishment in which the French princess excelled, in spite of her short stature and plain face. Suddenly the sound of martial music was heard in the garden, the ladies stopped dancing and rushed to the windows, where Don Ippolito himself appeared riding up the central avenue at the head of a splendid troop of cavaliers in armour. After bowing low to Renée, the gallant company drew up at one end of the terrace, and the ladies were admiring the prancing horses and rich attire, when another blast of trumpets rent the air, the great gates at the other end of the garden flew open, and a single knight, mounted on a white charger and clad in white and gold from head to foot, rode forth and challenged all comers to fight. "Of the brave deeds that followed and the lances that

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were broken," wrote the secretary Stabellino to Isabella at Mantua, "I need say no more when you learn that this solitary knight-errant all in white was none other than our own illustrious Prince Ercole."<sup>1</sup>

It was Ercole's successor, Alfonso the Second, who conceived the idea of connecting all the palaces and gardens in different parts of the city by a road and waterway reserved exclusively for the use of the Court. The Via Ducale, as it was called, consisted of a canal flowing between grassy banks and flowering shrubs, with a carriage road on either side shaded by tall elms and plane trees, and a footway bordered with pleached olive trees and a thick growth of vines. By this means the ducal family and their guests could go by boat or carriage or else on foot round three parts of the city without being exposed to the public gaze. Alfonso himself, who took genuine delight in gardening, often spent whole mornings riding along the Viale from one villa to another, planning fresh improvements and examining his shrubs and flowers.

Starting from the Gate of the Lions, the Viale led through the Castello Gardens and the grounds of Alfonso the First's Castellina to the Porta S. Benedetto, past the monastery of S. Gabriele, under a wall covered with a trellis of pomegranate trees. Then, turning a sharp corner, it followed the western ramparts, past the

<sup>1</sup> B. Fontana, *Renata di Francia*, i. 156.

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villa of Belfiore, and crossing the Via degli Angeli under a bridge, ran along the edges of the Barchetto to the north-east gates. Here, at the angle of the city walls, stood the Montagnola, a hill planted with orange and citron groves and watered by running streams descending in terra-cotta conduits from the summit. At the base of the mount was the Rotonda, a villa built by Ercole the Second, with cool subterranean halls, hidden in bowers of roses and jessamine, which were a favourite resort of the Court ladies in the summer heats.

Further still, at the extreme end of the eastern walls, looking down on the waters of the Po, the Viale reached yet another palace built by Ercole the Second at the foot of a hillock known as the Montagna di S. Giorgio, made from the soil of the trenches dug by Alfonso the First to defend Ferrara against Pope Julius the Second. Here Ercole and his son had laid out a vast labyrinth with marble fountains and a grotto adorned with niches and mosaics in the style of Raphael's Loggie. Winding paths, shaded by pergolas of vines and roses, led to the top of the hill, where a small piazza commanded a superb prospect over the city, while at its base was a lake with rose hedges rising in tiers from the water, and woods peopled with gold and silver pheasants.<sup>1</sup>

These villas were the scene of many sumptuous banquets and spectacles in the reign of the pleasure-

<sup>1</sup> M. A. Guarini, *op. cit.*, p. 296.



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loving Duke Alfonso the Second. On one occasion a masque with musical interludes called *Il Tempio d' Amore* was performed by a hundred gentlemen of the Court in the Castello Gardens; on another, the ducal family and a chosen company of their friends sat down to a banquet under an arbour of apple and pear, orange and lemon trees, laden with ripe fruit, and witnessed a performance of Tasso's *Aminta* in the sylvan glades opposite, as they sat at table.<sup>1</sup> But the most memorable *festà* was that given in honour of the French monarch, Henri III, on his return from Poland in 1574. A masque called *L'Isola Beata* was to be represented at the Montagna one summer evening, and preparations were made on a vast scale. Thousands of torches illuminated the scene, a mimic siege and battle on the lake were to be represented before the Court. All was ready for the fray, when suddenly the wooden walls of the sham castle caught fire and fell in with a crash, several of the combatants were thrown into the water and drowned, and the *festà*, which was to have been so gay, ended in death and disaster. But if the gardens of Ferrara and the festivities at the ducal Court reached a pitch of splendour never before attained under Duke Alfonso the Second, taxation also increased in an equal measure, and the Duke boasted that he had doubled his revenues by these exactions. The childless prince

<sup>1</sup> A. Solerti, *Ferrara e la corte estense*, p. 97.

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went to his grave unwept, and Pope Clement the Eighth, who took possession of his duchy, destroyed the wonderful palace of Belvedere to build a fortress, in order that he might maintain his rule over Ferrara.

The poets and humanists who flourished under the shadow of the house of Este shared their patrons' love of gardens. Guarino, who came to Ferrara as Leonello's tutor in 1429, and taught at the University for thirty years, was never happier than when he could escape from the lecture-room to his villa on the Adige. Here he cultivated his flowers and read the *Georgics* in the pasture among his flocks, while his energetic wife, Taddea, the mother of twenty-three children, herself worked in the fields. Under this humble roof old friends and young students were always welcome, and many distinguished scholars came to share the great teacher's frugal meal and enjoy what he called his "*fave e favole*"—"beans and talk." Angelo Decembrio tells us how the chief magistrate Gualengo would invite Leonello and his scholar friends to taste the first ripe figs in his garden and decorate his library with white and purple iris in honour of their visit. And we think of Matteo Boiardo, the poet of the *Orlando Innamorato*, spending the pleasant May-time in the meadows and woods along the Secchia, composing pastorals in imitation of Virgil and addressing love songs to the mistress whose golden tresses kept him bound to these rural

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shades. Ariosto, we learn from his son Virginio, was very fond both of building and gardening, but since he used the same methods that he did in writing verses and was always altering his home and digging up his fruit trees and vegetables, his operations seldom met with success.

“Never would he leave anything which he planted more than three months in the same place. If he sowed seeds or planted peach stones, he returned so often to see if they were sprouting that he ended by destroying the young shoots. And because he had little knowledge of plants, he often mistook other herbs which sprang up in the same border for those which he had sown, and watched their growth daily until it was impossible to have any doubt on the subject. Once, I remember, he sowed some capers and went to look at them every day, and was filled with joy at the sight of his fine crop of plants. But in the end he found that these were only shoots of elder, and that not one of the capers had come up.”

The poet's last years were spent in a little house in the Via Mirasole, the street that bears his name to-day, with the Latin inscription over the door describing his home as “small but fit for me, and hurtful to no one, and built with my own money.” This modest habitation has outlived the splendours of Belfiore and Belriguardo, and roses and carnations, oleanders and fruit trees, still blossom under the red brick walls of

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the garden where Ariosto looked in vain for his capers.

Meanwhile the Este princesses took their father's love of building and gardening to other homes. Beatrice, the youngest of Duke Ercole's daughters, and the wife of Lodovico Sforza, flung herself passionately into the delights of her new life at Milan. During a few short years her joyous laughter rang through the halls of the Rocchetta and woke the echoes of the Castello gardens. The foremost artists were ready to carry out her fancies and do her pleasure. Leonardo designed a pavilion with a round cupola for her labyrinth; Bramante made an elegant *ponticella* from her rooms to the garden below. Beatrice's name, set in a wreath of myrtle and laurel, may still be seen inscribed on the walls of the Sala Grande, which the great Florentine transformed into a bower of foliage. But the end came all too soon. One night the walls of Beatrice's own garden fell down with a sudden crash, and when dawn broke the Court and city learnt that the young Duchess was no more. Her husband, the proud Moro, whose career ended in disaster and captivity, was noted for his love of flowers. The choicest roses were sent him, with baskets of peaches and pears, of artichokes and apples, by his friends at Genoa and Pavia. He adorned the palace at his birthplace of Vigevano with hanging





A CONVENT GARDEN

(S. Bernardino, Verona)

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gardens, and spared no pains or expense to beautify the grounds of the Castello of Milan, which in his reign was as much as three miles in extent. One thing which he especially admired, both at Mantua and at Ferrara, were the swans which sailed in the castle moat, and at his request the Marquis of Mantua sent some of these handsome birds to adorn the trenches under the bastions at Milan.

When, in the agony of his grief after Beatrice's death, he lavished gifts on the friars of Santa Maria della Grazie, in whose church she was buried, one of his first thoughts was to enlarge and beautify the convent garden. Long afterwards the lively Dominican friar, Matteo Bandello, relates how, sitting under the long pergola in this same convent garden, he and Jacopo Antiquario, the Moro's old secretary, recalled the great acts and noble intentions of Duke Lodovico and lamented his miserable end. To-day the Castello of Pavia is a barrack, and not a trace remains of the Moro's once splendid gardens at Vigevano and Milan, but the famous Certosa, which he helped to build and justly called the finest jewel of his crown, is still standing in its vast grounds. Here we may see the spacious fruit and vegetable garden, with its clumps of ancient cypress trees and leafy pergola supported by stone pillars; here, close under the domes and pinnacles of the stately church, crimson roses bloom

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and a fountain sends up its sparkling waters in the little cloister with its slender marble columns and graceful terra-cotta mouldings. Without is the great cloister surrounded by the monks' cells, each one provided with a charming little garden and a loggia for use in wet weather.

Another of the Moro's works which survived his downfall were the gardens along the Naviglio Grande, the favourite waterway between Abbiategrasso and Milan, by which ambassadors and courtiers were constantly travelling to and fro. The beauty of these blossoming gardens excited the admiration of the French King's Benedictine chronicler, Jean d'Auton, when he accompanied Louis the Twelfth on his conquering march to Milan.

"On either side of the canal," he writes, "are great leafy guelder rose bushes and beautiful green meadows, planted with orchards and watered by running brooks. And all along the water's edge you see villas and pleasure-houses, connected with each other by draw-bridges thrown across the stream; and I was told that Signor Lodovico had been pleased to lay out this district, which is indeed so pleasant and delicious that it is more like Paradise than this earth."<sup>1</sup>

To this day several of these gardens along the old Lombard canals remain. One especially there is on the banks of the Martesana Naviglio, near Monza,

<sup>1</sup> *Chroniques*, ii. 187.



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which fortunately still belongs to direct descendants of the ducal line of Visconti. The villa is a noble structure built by Ruggieri in the first years of the eighteenth century, the terraced gardens with their pleached alleys and bright parterres, their fishponds, arbours, and finely wrought iron gates, take us back to still earlier days, when the Sforza reigned in Milan and Leonardo the Florentine was the Duke's chief engineer.

In the early part of the sixteenth century, during the troubled reign of Beatrice's sons, Maximilian and Francesco the Second, the gardens of Milan became famous as the meeting-place of many of those literary celebrities whose names live in Bandello's novels. The witty friar waxes eloquent in his description of Ippolita Sforza and Scipio Atellano's gardens, where the rival stars, Camilla Scarampi and Cecilia Gallerani, the Sappho of her day, recited their poems in the cool shade of a green pergola, and Lancinus Curtius and Antonio Fregoso discussed classical texts by the fountain side. Sometimes, as Bandello was telling one of his merry tales, the tramp of horses' feet would be heard in the street, a chariot decorated with the finest gold and inlaid work, drawn by four splendid chargers in rich trappings, would appear at the palace doors, and cavaliers and ladies would hasten with joyful acclamations to greet the gracious lady who honoured

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them with her presence. For this radiant apparition was none other than Isabella, the Marchioness of Mantua, sister of the lamented Duchess Beatrice, who had paused on the way to Monferrato to visit her Milanese kinsfolk.

Throughout her long life this typical lady of the Renaissance never faltered in the ardent pursuit of beauty, alike in art and nature. A prey to what Count Baldassare laughingly called "the cursed love of vagabondage" which flowed in the blood of the Este princes, Isabella's insatiable curiosity to see and hear new things prompted her to undertake frequent excursions in all parts of Italy. One of her first expeditions was to the Lake of Garda, where this bride of fifteen summers spent some delightful days with her sister-in-law, the charming Duchess of Urbino. Together they visited the gardens of Desenzano and the Roman ruins of Sermione—beloved of Catullus—and crossed the blue waters to the enchanting Riviera di Salò on the other shore. Everywhere the young princesses met with the warmest reception; the priest of Toscolano made them a feast of the most delicate fish on the shores of the lake, and the owners of the gardens stripped their trees bare and loaded Isabella's ladies with oranges and lemons. In after years the Marchesa frequently returned to the shores of the lake, each time with fresh delight in the beauty of the

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prospect and the luxuriant vegetation of this lovely region. On one memorable visit which she paid to Salò in 1513 she was the object of a popular ovation on the part of the natives, who poured out in boats to meet her barge and brought her presents of fish and fruit, and, what pleased her less, tedious addresses to which she was compelled to listen. And it was on Lady Day, while she lingered in the lemon groves, that she received the *Symposium* which her learned friend, the Vicentine humanist Trissino, had composed in her honour, a present, as she wrote to the donor, altogether appropriate to this divine Riviera, where she felt free to devote herself wholly to poetry and meditation.

The sight of the palace gardens at Gubbio and Urbino moved Isabella to make improvements in the ancient Castello of the Gonzagas at Mantua. Here, on the ground floor of the grim old building, she had her famous Grotta—an open court paved with majolica tiles bearing Gonzaga devices and surrounded with elegant columns and niches containing busts and statues. Her idea was to make this a place of retreat, where, surrounded by beautiful paintings and marbles, she could enjoy the pleasures of solitude or the company of a few kindred spirits, and with this end in view she was never weary of importuning her friends to get her “some beautiful thing for the Grotta!”

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On one side it opened into the studio adorned with the works of Mantegna and Costa, of Perugino and Correggio, and the priceless antiques which she had been at infinite pains to collect from the ruins of Rome or the isles of the Archipelago. On the other it led into a little garden full of the choicest fruits and the sweetest flowers, of the trees and plants that she loved best. Often during her absence from Mantua the Marchesana's thoughts turned to this little corner of the world which in a peculiar way bore the stamp of her individuality, and she begged her friends at home for the latest report of this favourite garden.

"I have been to your palace," wrote a favoured gentleman of her suite one May-day when the Marchesana was in Rome, "and I have seen your little garden which is so green and beautiful that it might be Paradise itself; the little apple trees are already laden with large fruit, my friends the figs are ripening fast, the jessamines are climbing heavenwards, and everything invites to joy and calls on you to return home. That divine Grotta would give light and glory to hell itself."<sup>1</sup>

Here, too, in the brightest corner of the little garden, was the beautiful loggia where Isabella invited Castiglione to sup with her on his return from Rome, and for which this loyal knight sighed in the burning

<sup>1</sup> A. Luzio in *Arch. st. lomb.* xxxv. 19.

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heats of August. "The loggia expects you eagerly," replied the gracious Marchesana, "and will make you the more welcome for the fine praises which you have bestowed upon it."

Even dearer to Isabella's heart in her later years was Porto, the summer palace half a mile from Mantua on the edge of the Lago Superiore, just where the Mincio flows into the lake whose waters sleep under the Castello walls. Soon after her marriage the Marquis had given this villa to his wife, and Isabella devoted all her savings to the embellishment of the house and gardens. She employed the architect Biagio Rossetti to build a garden-house on the pattern of her mother's *casino* at Ferrara, and made Cristoforo Solari design a magnificent fountain for the terrace. This Lombard sculptor, who carved the beautiful effigies of Lodovico Sforza and Beatrice at the Certosa, promised to execute the marble reliefs and statues for the work with his own hand, but, after the wont of great masters, he delayed completing his task from year to year, until he died of the plague, leaving the Marchesa's fountain to be finished by other hands.

Isabella spent most of the summer months in this charming spot, where she loved to escape from the ceremonial duties and cares of the Court and lead the simple life after her own fashion. Here she and Elisabetta Gonzaga came for change of air and rest

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after the fatigues of Lucrezia Borgia's wedding, with only two or three ladies, "the cooks and the carvers," and the baby-boy Federico, without whom his mother declared she could not be happy. Here they were enjoying each other's society and the gardens of Porto in all the beauty of June, when the news of Cæsar Borgia's sudden invasion of Urbino reached Mantua, and after a few days of terrible suspense Duke Guidobaldo himself arrived, having ridden day and night before his pursuers and "only saved his shirt and doublet." Here Isabella came after her return from the Court of Leo the Tenth in 1515, feeling that it was easier to think of the delights of Rome and the friends whom she had left behind in these solitary shades than in the little rooms and dull society of Mantua. In those days the Marchesana's gardens at Porto became one of the sights of Italy and attracted illustrious strangers from all parts. "I sing the praises of the delicious gardens of Porto," wrote the Venetian priest, Niccolò Liburnio, in a pastoral idyll dedicated to Isabella, "the charm of their perpetual verdure and running waters, of their abundant fruit and fragrant flowers."

Cardinals and foreign ambassadors, Giuliano de' Medici and the "Bel Bernardo" Bibbiena, the Viceroy Cardona and the legate Chiericati, Bembo and Trissino, were among the guests whom Isabella welcomed at her villa. Another distinguished scholar, the saintly Fra

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Francesco of Ferrara, who afterwards became general of the Dominican Order, the biographer of the Beata Osanna and author of a famous commentary on the *Summa*, visited Porto in the Marchesana's absence, and expressed his admiration for the beautiful country house in a letter of thanks to Isabella.

"This palace and gardens are indeed most charming, and seem to me to have been laid out with the greatest skill by Your Highness. Only the bitterness of my own thoughts prevents me from fully enjoying these rare delights. Another time, when I am in a happier state of mind, I shall hope to return here and look with greater attention at this house with its gardens and lovely surroundings."<sup>1</sup>

And he goes on to explain that sorely against his wish he has been appointed Prior at Ferrara, and that instead of returning to his favourite studies at Milan he will be compelled to undertake the management of friars, an office which he disliked above all else.

A Dominican of a very different type, Fra Matteo Bandello, was a constant visitor at Porto, and has left us many charming descriptions of its gardens and of the excellent company which he found there.

"It was my habit," he writes, "during the summer months which I spent at Mantua to go two or three

<sup>1</sup> Luzio and Renier, *Giornale st. d. lett.* 1900.

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times a week to pay my respects to Madama Isabella d'Este, Marchesa di Mantova, in her most delightful palace of Porto, and spend the whole day discussing different subjects with her lords and ladies, sometimes in the presence of Her Excellency, sometimes among ourselves." <sup>1</sup>

As they sat in the cool marble halls looking out on the crystalline waters, "Madama Illustrissima" would desire Bandello to read some tale from Livy aloud to the company. This would give rise to animated discussions over the action of the Roman matron Lucrezia or some similar incident, and while the secretaries, Mario Equicola and Capilupi, were still arguing the question, perhaps a new personage would appear on the scene in the shape of the "noble, gentle, and learned knight," Baldassare Castiglione, and Madama would invoke his authority to settle the dispute. On sultry afternoons, when the heat was oppressive and not a breath stirred the leaves, Madama and her ladies were in the habit of retiring to their rooms on the upper floor for a brief siesta, and Pirro Gonzaga or Bandello himself would lead the way to the grove of poplars which Isabella had planted in memory of her father, Ercole, a few months after his death. Here, sitting on the fine smooth turf by the running stream, they would tell merry tales of Archdeacon Gabbioneta, the laughing-stock of all the

<sup>1</sup> *Novelle*, i. 125.



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wits at Court, or repeat the last gossip which had come from Milan and Ferrara, until the barking of Madama's little dogs announced her return. Then the company would stroll slowly under the shady avenues by the lakeside, talking of what pleased them best, or sitting in groups on the grass amuse themselves with reading, music, and singing, or other pastimes. And whenever anything especially noteworthy or amusing was said, Madama would turn to Fra Matteo and bid him write this down in his notebook.

Many fine talkers there were in these circles, as Bandello tells us, eloquent courtiers like Count Baldassare and merry souls such as young Alessandro Gonzaga and the Marchesa's chamberlain Baesso, who always had some pleasant jest on his lips. Scholars and travellers of repute often found their way to Porto and were always sure of a cordial reception. The courtier who brought the latest news of the Vatican intrigues from Rome, the nuncio who had visited the Court of Whitehall and the wilds of Ireland, the Vicentine sailor who had been round the world with Magellan and seen olive-skinned Indians, gold ingots, and birds of paradise, were all eagerly welcomed by this brilliant lady, who, in her own words, was always eager to hear any new thing.

Isabella herself took a practical interest in garden-

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ing, and showed her skill, not only in laying out the grounds at Porto but in the cultivation of rare plants and exotic trees. She sent her head gardener frequently to Murano to visit the gardens of her friends, Andrea Navagero and Trifone Gabriele, and occasionally, as a great favour, allowed him to give advice to others. When the distinguished humanist, Giangiorgio Trissino, built a villa at Cricoli, near Vicenza, and laid out a formal garden in front of his palace, he begged the Marchesa to take pity on his ignorance and allow her gardener to show him the best way of trimming box trees.

“I am just now living at Cricoli,” he wrote to her in April 1537, “at a little place of mine not further from Vicenza than Porto is from Mantua, and have had a garden planted with various kinds of trees, among others some box trees, which were arranged in symmetrical order, but which, owing to the neglect or ignorance of my gardeners, have been allowed to run wild. And since I know that Your Excellency’s gardener at Porto is an expert in these matters, I venture to ask very humbly if you will give him leave to come here for a few days and see my garden, and show me how the box trees should be trimmed, and whatever else my garden requires. So I am sending my servant to beg Your Excellency with all humility if it be possible to allow your gardener to come back with him for two days, and shall remain eternally obliged for this favour, and count it chief

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among many others which I have received from you."

Isabella was graciously pleased to accede to this urgent request and allowed her gardener to visit Cricoli, but took care to add that she hoped he would send back the man as soon as possible, since the garden at Porto was in great want of his services. A week later Trissino sent a grateful letter saying that "the gardener's arrival had been most opportune in this rainy weather," and that his advice had proved exceedingly profitable to the box trees of his garden, which were now in perfect order, for all of which he rendered her Excellency immortal thanks.

"And now," he adds, "I am sending the gardener back in order that Porto may not suffer by his absence."<sup>1</sup>

To the last Isabella retained her keen sense of enjoyment and pleasure in planning buildings and gardens. She helped Giulio Romano with her advice in preparing the Palazzina, an elegant suite of rooms which was added to the Castello at the time of her son Federico's wedding, and expressed the highest approval of the terraced garden and loggia on the top of the roof, saying that she should have thought herself very fortunate if, when she first came to

<sup>1</sup> B. Morsolin, *Giangiorgio Trissino*, p. 493.

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Mantua, such a home had been prepared for her.<sup>1</sup> In 1535 she visited the shores of the Lake of Garda once more and revelled in the beauties of the gardens at Sermione and Salò as fully as when she had first seen them five-and-forty years before.

All through Isabella's life the foremost masters of the age were ready to do her bidding. Raphael painted a Madonna for her Grotta and designed a tomb for her lord. Leonardo once sent her a sketch of a Florentine villa and garden which the Marquis had admired, but remarked that in order to make the thing perfect it would be necessary to bring the site of the house to Mantua. He excused himself for not colouring the ivy, box, and other evergreens of the garden, but offered to send her a painting and a model of the villa, a thing which we may be quite sure he never did. Many years afterwards, when Castiglione returned to Mantua on his way to Spain, he brought with him from Rome the plan of a beautiful garden and habitation designed by Michelangelo. Great was the excitement at Court when the model was set up before Madama. Courtiers and ladies alike were loud in praises of the ingenuity of the plans, and her son, the Duke, declared that he would certainly build a palace from these admirable designs. But money, as usual, was scarce at Mantua.

<sup>1</sup> S. Davari, *Arch. st. Lombardo*, 1895.

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The new theatre at Marmirolo had cost some 20,000 ducats, and Giulio Romano was already beginning his sumptuous palace on the marshy grounds of the Tè. So Michelangelo's designs were put aside and forgotten. Fortunately they fell into the hands of some of his friends at Florence, and long afterwards, when Agostino Dini built himself a villa, they were brought to light. The Dini family had been intimate with Michelangelo himself, and Santi di Tito, the architect whom Agostino employed, was a pupil of Bandinelli and, like all his contemporaries, held the great man's memory in the highest honour. The house which he reared for Dini on the hills beyond the Certosa di Val d'Ema has always been traditionally ascribed to Michelangelo, and its noble and austere simplicity bears the stamp of the master's genius. It stands on the top of a lofty ridge looking towards Pistoia and the distant Apennines. On either side long cypress avenues lead up to a terrace from which a majestic double flight of steps flanked with lions ascends to a paved courtyard. The south front of the villa, consisting of a two-storied arcade of slender columns, supporting a roof with projecting eaves, is built round three sides of this court. At the back is a stately loggia and another double stairway leading down to a sunny parterre, with orange and lemon trees in terra-cotta pots, low box hedges, and an ilex grove

## ITALIAN GARDENS OF THE RENAISSANCE

beyond. The lines are simple and severe, the aspect singularly imposing, and the whole, we feel, is worthy of the man to whom the original design has been ascribed and whose model Count Baldassare brought to Mantua for Isabella d'Este.

## THE GARDENS OF PAPAL ROME

"Dimmi ch'io potrò aver ozio talora  
Di riveder le Muse, e con lor, sotto  
Le sacre frondi ir poetando ancora . . .  
Pei Sette Colli."

ARIOSTO.

IMPERIAL Rome, we are often told, was a city of gardens. The sumptuous pleasure-grounds of the Emperors and the gardens of wealthy patricians, such as Lucullus and Sallust, extended over a large portion of the Seven Hills. On the terraced slopes at the foot of the Janiculum were the public gardens bequeathed by Julius Cæsar to the people; on the opposite heights of the Esquiline was the villa of Mæcenas, where Horace and his friends enjoyed the hospitality of their august patron. Even the Suburra was not without flowers, and Pliny speaks of the window-gardens of the poorer citizens. The sites of these old gardens and the names of their owners still lingered in the mind of the mediæval Roman, from whose memory the vision of ancient Rome and its departed splendours had never wholly faded. But the revival of gardening that formed so marked a feature of the Renaissance did not reach Papal Rome until the first years of the sixteenth century.

## ITALIAN GARDENS OF THE RENAISSANCE

As Tuscan architects and painters built the chapels of Nicholas the Fifth and Sixtus the Fourth, and decorated their walls with frescoes, so the Vatican garden was first of all laid out, not by a Roman citizen, but by Bramante of Urbino.

The great man who transformed Italian architecture in the sixteenth century was a native of that little duchy in the heart of the Apennines, where art and letters flourished under the paternal rule of the best of princes, and the finest spirits of the age met at the court of the Montefeltro Dukes. Born in 1444 at a farm two miles from Urbino, young Bramante saw with his own eyes the building of Laurana's wonderful palace, and, there can be little doubt, was himself a pupil of the Istrian architect. At thirty he went to Milan, where he entered the service of the Sforza Dukes and became the favourite architect of that enlightened prince, Lodovico il Moro, "the master of those who know." For the next five-and-twenty years he lived at this brilliant court in close companionship with Leonardo and Caradosso, building churches and bridges, superintending works in the provinces, or rearing graceful colonnades and painting frescoes in the Castello. When the final catastrophe came and "the Duke," in Leonardo's mournful words, "lost state, fortune, and liberty" at one blow, Bramante was compelled to leave his buildings unfinished and seek



## THE GARDENS OF PAPAL ROME

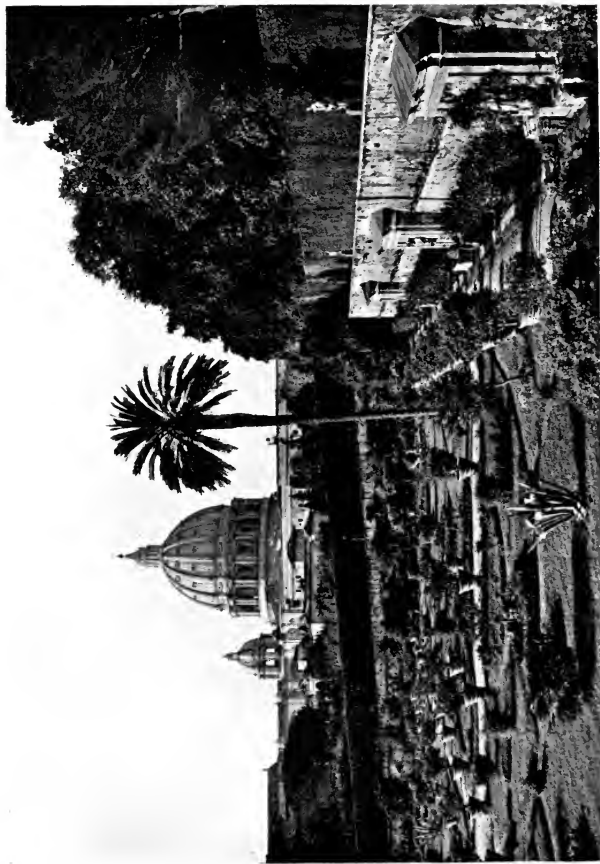
his fortunes elsewhere. Early in 1500 he found his way to Rome, where he devoted the next few years to the careful study of classical remains. Soon his talents brought him into notice at the Papal Court. He was engaged, according to Bottari, to design the fountains on the Piazza of St. Peter's, and in 1502 built the famous Tempietto in the Franciscan convent on the Janiculan Hill for the "Catholic kings," Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. The erection of this beautiful little shrine, which shows how entirely Bramante had assimilated the principles of classical art, marked a new epoch in the history of architecture and ensured the Urbino master's recognition as the most original builder of the age. No sooner had Julius the Second assumed the Papal tiara than Bramante was summoned to carry out the new Pope's lofty dreams and ordered to rebuild St. Peter's and restore the old Vatican palace. Nothing daunted by the magnitude of these undertakings, the master, who was already sixty years of age, threw himself with ardour into his new task. On the one hand, he laid the foundations of the new Basilica, while on the other he prepared a magnificent design for the transformation of the Vatican.

Before Bramante's time little attention had been paid to the treatment of gardens on architectural lines, or the laying out of vast spaces as an harmonious

## ITALIAN GARDENS OF THE RENAISSANCE

setting for the palace or villa. But the student of Vitruvius and Alberti, the friend of Leonardo and Luca Pacioli, came to Rome with new ideas teeming in his brain. He remembered the Duchess's garden in the court of the great palace at Urbino, with its stately fountain, well-ordered walks, and glorious view of the Apennines, and thought of Beatrice d'Este's sunny pleasaunce under the loggia of the Rocchetta, where clear waters gleamed among the flowers and grassy lawns. Now he had to work on a larger scale and lay out the Vatican precincts in a manner worthy of the Supreme Pontiff.

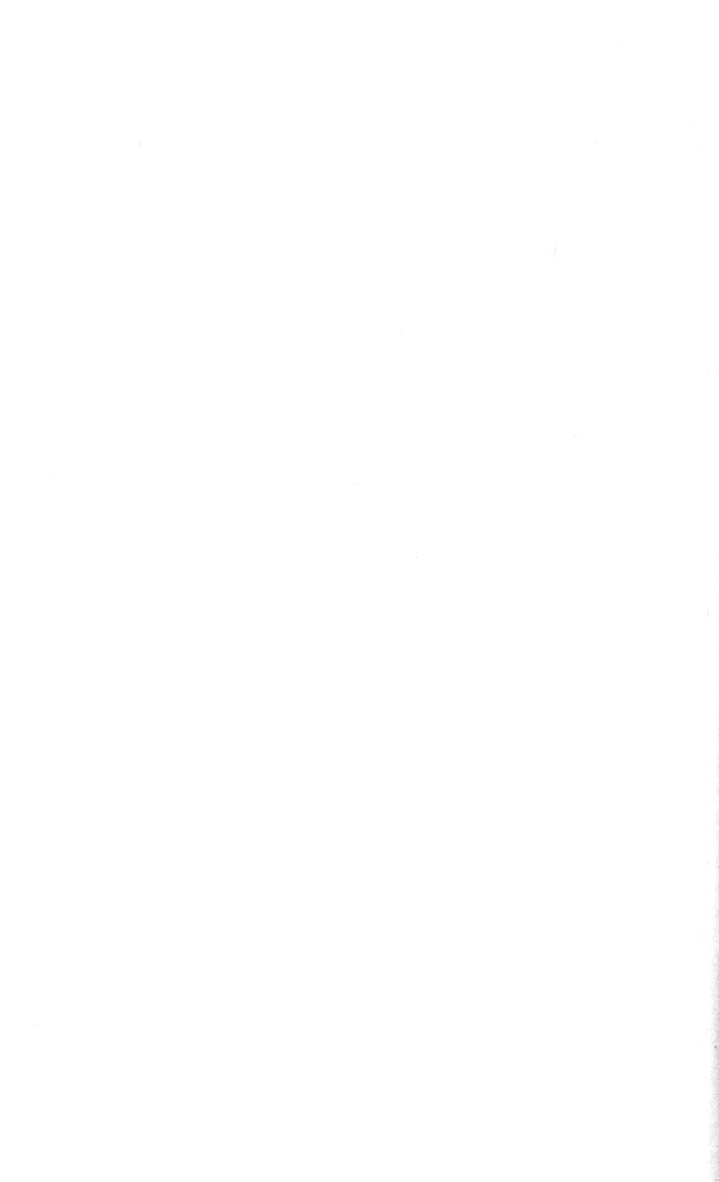
It was the Pope's wish to connect his own rooms in the old palace with the Casino of the Belvedere, built by Innocent the Eighth on a spur of the Vatican hill, in order that he might be able to visit his collection of precious antiques, without exposure to weather. Accordingly Bramante designed two long parallel galleries or loggie, each consisting of three stories of arcade, to bridge over the valley lying between the Vatican and the rising ground on which the villa stands. One loggia looked out on the wooded slopes of the hillside, the other commanded a beautiful view of Rome and the Campagna. The enclosure between these galleries was divided into two portions. The lower court, nearest to the Vatican, was to serve as a theatre or arena for jousts and pageants, bull-fights



*Photo: Anderson, Rome*

## THE VATICAN GARDENS

(Casino di Piove)



## THE GARDENS OF PAPAL ROME

or comedies, while the upper half, reaching to the villa walls, was laid out as a garden with broad flights of steps, wide terraces, and avenues of cypress and orange trees. A superb fountain, adorned with the famous Pigna or bronze cone which, according to an old tradition, once crowned the Mausoleum of Hadrian and afterwards, as Dante records, stood in the Atrium of old St. Peter's, was placed in the centre of the highest terrace. Immediately behind this fountain, closing in the view, was a colossal niche, eighty feet high, roofed over with a semi-cupola and hemi-cycle of pillars, and forming an imposing façade to the Belvedere. At the same time Bramante enlarged and beautified the villa. A Cortile or inner hall, to contain the Pope's antique statues, was added, as well as the celebrated spiral staircase with tiers of Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian pillars rising one above another. This stairway was constructed in such a manner that it might be ascended on horseback, and caused the Roman wits to say that the Pope's architect had made a new road to heaven, broad and easy enough for the feeblest souls to get there.

The greatest admiration was excited by Bramante's plans, and the progress of the work was hurried on by the Pope with characteristic impetuosity. "The design of this fabric," wrote Vasari, "was considered so fine that nothing equal to it had been seen in Rome

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since ancient times." Unfortunately, both Julius the Second and Bramante died before the Loggie were completed, and the grandeur and unity of the Urbino master's conception was destroyed by the tasteless additions of future Popes. Before the end of the century Sixtus the Fifth walled in the Loggie and built the Library, which cut the great Court in two, while in later times the roofing over of the Belvedere Cortile and building of the Braccio Nuovo completed the ruin of what was once the finest garden in the world.

Many and varied are the testimonies that we have to the beauty of the "Prato del Belvedere"—the *Bellum Videri Pratum*, as the Giardino della Pigna was called in these early days. In 1510, when both Julius the Second and Bramante were still living, the Marquis of Mantua's son, Federico Gonzaga, was sent to Rome as a hostage for his father's good behaviour on his release from captivity at Venice. The handsome ten-year-old boy, who was the apple of his mother Isabella's eyes, became the old Pope's pet and plaything and the spoiled child of the Cardinals, who sought to win the Marchesa's good graces by this easy way to her heart.

"His Highness is lodged in the finest rooms of the palace," wrote his tutor Stazio Gadio, "and takes his meals in a most beautiful loggia looking all over the Campagna, which is justly called Belvedere. He

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spends the whole day walking about these delicious gardens and groves of pines and orange trees, which afford him the greatest possible pleasure.”<sup>1</sup>

The Pope's collection of antiques, which daily received new additions, was another source of continual delight, and Federico filled his letters to his mother with glowing descriptions of the Laocoon, which had lately been dug up in the Sette Sale, near the Baths of Titus, and which he longed to send home to Mantua. Only a year after the discovery of the Laocoon, a Roman who was digging in his garden in the Campo de' Fiori, found a life-size image of Hercules wearing the lion's skin, with a club in one arm and the boy Telephus on the other. This statue was taken to the Belvedere the same day, and the lucky finder was rewarded by the Pope with a benefice worth 130 ducats a year. At this time there was a perfect passion for antiques in Rome, and the keenest competition prevailed among cardinals and princes for the marbles that were brought to light. Great excitement was caused when, one day in January 1512, some masons who were building a house near the Dominican Church of S. Maria sopra Minerva discovered a large recumbent statue of the river-god Tiber, with the wolf suckling Romulus and Remus at his side. This group was also secured for the Pope and brought to the Bel-

<sup>1</sup> A. Luzio, *Federico Ostaggio*, p. 9.

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vedere, together with a sleeping Cleopatra, afterwards more correctly named Ariadne. The Laocoon, the so-called Venus of Cnidus, and the famous Apollo which had belonged to the Pope before his accession, were placed in the niches of Bramante's Cortile, and the other statues and sarcophagi were arranged among the orange trees, planted at intervals and watered with running streams.

On summer evenings the Pope often supped in the cool loggia and played backgammon with Federico Gonzaga, or listened to music and recitations. In the days of Leo the Tenth these gardens were the scene of frequent entertainments. The strains of viols and flutes were heard far on into the night, while his Holiness, who was passionately fond of music, listened with closed eyes and head thrown back, beating time with his hand and singing the tune under his breath.

Bramante and the goldsmith Caradosso both had rooms in the villa in the time of Julius the Second. Later on, the sculptor Baccio Bandinelli lived there, and was employed by Leo the Tenth to make a copy of the Laocoon for King Francis, who had boldly asked his Holiness to make him a present of the original marbles. The Florentine master never forgot the beauty of the Belvedere grounds; and twenty or thirty years afterwards, when he was making a fountain for the Grand Duchess Eleonora's gardens in the Pitti,



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he wrote to the Grand Duke Cosimo: "Some day, if it please your Excellency, I will show you the designs which Bramante prepared for the lawns and fountains of Pope Giulio's gardens, and which Raphael of Urbino afterwards imitated in the grounds that he laid out for Popes Leo and Clement. In these same Belvedere gardens I lived for many years myself." And the sculptor proceeds to explain how those great examples have taught him to adapt the shape and ornament of his fountain to its surroundings, and to impress upon Cosimo the desirability of preserving the grassy mead in front of his palace—"a corner—it seems to me—as full of natural loveliness as any place on earth."<sup>1</sup>

Here, too, by Pope Leo's invitation, that noble soul, Count Baldassare Castiglione, took up his abode in the summer of 1521, when his duties as Mantuan ambassador kept him at the Vatican. In the sad days, when he mourned for his lost Ippolita, and could hardly believe himself to be in Rome now that his poor Raphael was gone, the sorely stricken man could find no better comfort than the peace and beauty of these shades. Here, as he wandered at will among the orange groves and fountains, he could feast his eyes on those wonders of antique sculpture, the Laocoon which inspired his friend Sadoletto's Muse and the Cleopatra which he had himself celebrated

<sup>1</sup> Bottari, *Raccolte di Lettere*, p. 93.

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in song. Here in June evenings he could linger on the wide balconies under Bramante's arcades, looking down on the road by which all the ambassadors entered the city, or watching the joyous band of youths and maidens at play in the meadows along the Tiber.

"I am living here in the Belvedere," he wrote to his mother at Mantua. "It is a real refreshment to my spirit. Would to God you had so delightful a place to live in, as this villa with its beautiful view and delicious gardens, filled with all these noble antiques, fountains, basins, and running water! And what suits me best of all, I am close to the Pope's palace."<sup>1</sup>

But the best and fullest description that we have of the Belvedere gardens is from the pen of Pietro Pesaro, one of the three Venetian envoys who were sent to congratulate Pope Adrian the Sixth on his election in the spring of 1523. They had started for Rome in the previous autumn, but had been compelled to turn back again at Bologna for fear of the plague, and had set out again in March, travelling by the rougher roads and staying at remote country inns to avoid infection. But the cordial reception which they met with atoned for all these privations. One Venetian Cardinal, the excellent Patriarch Grimani, gave them a splendid banquet on St. Mark's Day, when, according to custom, he threw open his palace

<sup>1</sup> Serassi, *Lettere*, i. p. 76.

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doors to all citizens of the Republic. Another member of the Sacred College, Marco Cornaro, took them out hunting in the Campagna and himself led the chase clad in a scarlet coat and mounted on a white horse perfect in its shape and paces. The ambassadors visited all the chief sights in Rome, paid their vows at the altars of the Seven Churches, and saw Raphael of Urbino's new-made tomb in the great Rotonda, where he had willed to lie. They were profoundly impressed by the vast dimensions of the Coliseum and the Thermae and the immense size of the new fabric of St. Peter's, while the splendours of the Vatican surpassed their highest expectation. The frescoes in the Stanze of the Papal Chapel, the silken tapestries and profusion of gold and silver plate, the splendid-looking Swiss Guards in their white, green and yellow liveries, filled them with breathless admiration. "Surely," they exclaimed, "no other monarch in the world has so glorious a palace!" The Holy Father himself, it must be confessed, disappointed them. A devout and learned man he was, beyond all doubt, and well disposed towards the Signory of Venice, but he struck them as timid and irresolute, and, for a Pope, very miserly in his habits and expenditure. The change from the days of Leo was great. The Cardinals who made their home in the Vatican had been sent back to their own dioceses, the

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poets and scholars who fed at the Pope's table were dismissed. Silence reigned in the vast halls where his Holiness lived alone with two dull Flemish chamberlains and employed an old peasant woman to cook his meals.

When the ambassadors asked leave to see the Belvedere, they were kept waiting over an hour while the Pope sent for the keys of his private door, by which alone access to the villa could be gained, since he had ordered the other eleven entrances to be closed. The priceless antiques which adorned the Cortile were in Adrian's eyes but Pagan idols, which, as the Venetian Negri remarked, he would gladly have broken up and ground into lime for use in the building of St. Peter's. But when once admittance had been obtained, the ambassadors were lost in wonder and delight. They walked through Bramante's colonnades and Raphael's brilliantly decorated loggia, still in part unfinished, to the villa and looked down on the churches and palaces of the Eternal City with the many-coloured plains of the Campagna and Alban Hills beyond—"a place indeed," they exclaimed, "worthy of the name *Belvedere*." Here they found themselves in the fairest garden in the world, laid out with grassy lawns and groves of laurel, cypress, and mulberry trees, and adorned with fountains of sparkling waters. Then they passed through a lofty portico,

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inscribed with the motto "*Procul este profani*," into an inner court about 100 feet square, paved with terra-cotta tiles and planted with most beautiful orange trees. Here at length they beheld the renowned statues. In the centre of the garden were the colossal groups of the river-gods Nile and Tiber, with fountains sending up jets of water on either side. Close to the entrance stood the Hercules, with the boy in his arms; in a niche to the left, mounted on a massive pedestal, was the Apollo, "famous in the whole world," a life-size figure of the finest marble, and on the other side the still more wonderful group of Laocoon, "a work," they exclaimed, "so natural and full of life that it can never, surely, be surpassed in the whole history of human art." "Even the exquisite grace of the Greek Venus," continues Pesaro; "nay, the glory of the celebrated Apollo itself, are forgotten in the presence of this most excellent work."<sup>1</sup> So, in impassioned words that fill many pages of his narrative, the Venetian ambassador describes the wonders of the Belvedere, in the golden age of the Renaissance.

Bramante's creation, as may be supposed, gave a marked impulse to the art of gardening in Rome. Everywhere on the Seven Hills new gardens sprang

<sup>1</sup> E. Alberi, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori Veneti*, Serie II, vol. iii. p. 116.

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up, laid out on architectural lines, with broad terraces and flights of steps, and adorned with ancient sarco-phaghi and statues, with frescoed summer-houses and fountains of bronze and marble. Scholars and poets, merchants and princes, vied with Cardinals and Papal officials in making gardens—alike in the heart of the city and in its immediate neighbourhood. Cardinal Grimani, whose house at the foot of the Capitol—now the Palazzo Venezia—was only second in size and splendour to the Cancelleria, had a lawn of the finest and greenest grass in the court of his palace, with a fountain in the centre, surrounded by laurel and orange bowers and avenues of cypress, “a thing,” wrote Pesaro, “truly marvellous to behold.” Close by, the terraced gardens of the Colonna Palace stretched up the steep slopes of the Quirinal, with the colossal fragment of the Temple of the Sun, its gigantic pillars and sculptured cornice towering into the skies. Here, in the summer of 1526, when the plague was raging in Rome, Isabella d’Este and her lively maidens spent the hot July days and received their chosen guests “in this most beautiful garden,” where they enjoyed themselves so much that they seldom cared to drive out in the chariot, and, as the Marchesa told her son, preferred not to run any risks.

On the site of the gardens of Sallust, near the Acqua Virgo, were the “*Horti Colotiani*,” where

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Angelo Colocci, the head of the Academy, entertained the flower of Roman society at those happy meetings which Sadoletto recalled with tender regret, after the sack of Rome had destroyed the beauties of the Eternal City and scattered all his friends. Sometimes the same pleasant company met in Blosio Palladio's gardens on the Tiber banks, or in the house of the venerable German Bishop Göritz, near Trajan's Forum. Sometimes they climbed the Janiculum, and were entertained by Baldassare Turini, the friend and executor of Raphael, in a villa which boasted of enjoying the finest view in Rome. Phaedrus Inghirami, the learned librarian of the Vatican, whose massive brow and squinting eyes are familiar to us in Raphael's portrait, bought a country-house on the Palatine and adorned its halls with fragments of old Roman frescoes, while Latino Giovenale Manetti, another member of the Urbino circle, set the fashion of decorating his garden walls with ancient inscriptions and classical reliefs.

More famous than any of these was the villa of the Sienese banker, Agostino Chigi, in the Lungara, on the right bank of the Tiber, now known as the Farnesina. This simple two-storied building—in Vasari's words, "*Non murato ma veramente nato*"—was an ideal pleasure-house for a merchant prince of Chigi's type, who could afford to indulge his fine taste

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and spend his leisure hours in luxurious ease. The best artists in Rome—the Sienese master Baldassare Peruzzi, who was probably the architect of the house, Sebastiano del Piombo and Sodoma—decorated the rooms with frescoes. At the end of one hall Raphael painted his divine Galatea, in which Castiglione saw the perfect flower of the humanist's dreams, while his scholars decorated the spandrels of the open loggia with scenes from the popular tale of Cupid and Psyche, and transformed its vaulted roof into a bower of green leaves and garlands of flowers with rich tapestries spread out against the blue sky. When at Christmas 1518 the wealthy banker opened his villa doors to the public, all Rome flocked to Trastevere, and a scene of the wildest enthusiasm took place. Poets celebrated the marvels of Chigi's villa in Latin and Italian verse and congratulated the owner on the possession of this pearl without price. Unfortunately the garden-house designed by Raphael on the edge of the river, where Chigi entertained the Pope and Cardinals at banquets of Lucullan fame, was demolished, together with the greater part of the villa grounds, when the new embankment was built in 1883.

Leo the Tenth, the typical Renaissance Pope, who determined, from the moment of his election, "to enjoy the Papacy," and took especial interest in all the minor branches of art, shared the fashionable taste



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for gardens. When he was at the Vatican he rarely failed to take an afternoon ride on his white mule to inspect the latest improvements in the grounds, and he laid out a garden in the precincts of the Castell' Sant' Angelo, where he spent the Carnival, looking on at masquerades or watching mimic battles in which the members of his household pelted each other with oranges. He too had a country-house which he took delight in beautifying, at La Magliana (Manlian, as the English ambassadors called it), in the Campagna on the way to Fiumicino, nine miles beyond the Porta Portese. It is a pleasant spot, in the green meadows on the banks of the Tiber, with charming views of the winding river and Alban Hills. Girolamo Riario, the nephew of Sixtus the Fourth, first built a hunting-lodge here, surrounded by a moat and battlemented walls, on the site of a farm which originally belonged to the Manlian *gens*, and Julius the Second employed Bramante to add a banquet-hall which still bears the oak-tree of the "della Rovere" on the frieze. Leo the Tenth found La Magliana a convenient centre for hunting expeditions, and often sought shelter in this favourite retreat from business cares. In his later years he built a grand staircase and consistorial hall on the upper floor, which Lo Spagna decorated with graceful frescoes of "Apollo and the Muses" from Raphael's designs. And an entry in the household accounts kept by the Pope's

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confidential chamberlain, Serapica, records the payment of wages to the labourers who planted lemon and mulberry trees in the garden at La Magliana.<sup>1</sup> Many were the gay festivities that were held here, many the memorable interviews that took place in these halls. Here, in the winter of 1515, the Pope gave one of his big hunting parties in honour of Isabella d'Este, when fifty stags and twenty wild boars were killed in one day. Here in the following year Isabella's sister-in-law, the noble Duchess Elisabetta, came to make a last effort on behalf of her nephew Francesco Maria, and vainly implored the Holy Father to avert the blow that was about to fall on her beloved Urbino. It was at La Magliana, in November 1521, that Leo the Tenth received tidings of the rout of the French and the capture of Milan, a piece of news which, he told Castiglione, gave him as much pleasure as his election to the Papacy. And here, that same evening, as he watched the bonfires which the Swiss guards lighted in honour of this joyful event, he caught the fatal chill which ended his life in a few days.

"On Sunday," wrote Castiglione to Mantua, "the Pope received the news. The next Sunday he was dead. Exactly a week ago he returned from La Magliana with as much joy and triumph as when he was first made Pope. The whole city came out to

<sup>1</sup> L. Pastor, *History of the Popes*, viii. 166.

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meet him, and troops of children waving olive boughs in their hands. To-day there will be a very different kind of procession. . . . So the glories of this world pass away and our Lord God shatters the plans of poor mortals as He sees fit.”<sup>1</sup>

After Leo the Tenth's death La Magliana was practically deserted by the Papal Court. To-day it is a farmhouse and the walls are crumbling to pieces. The ceilings are blackened with smoke, and the banquet-halls where cardinals and princes feasted have been turned into barns and stables. Lo Spagna's frescoes were removed many years ago to the Louvre and the Capitol, and little remains to recall the time when these empty halls were crowded with a gay throng of courtiers and servants, and the clatter of horses' hoofs and the joyous sound of the horn rang through the courtyard.

Popes and cardinals, princes and scholars, each had his country-house which he built and decorated after his fashion. But the grandest of all the villas that rose into being in the age of Leo was the pleasure-house which Raphael built on the slopes of Monte Mario for the Pope's nephew, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, afterwards Pope Clement the Seventh. Not only was Cardinal Giulio his uncle's most influential counsellor, but popular report already marked him out

<sup>1</sup> Contin, *Lettere Diplomatiche*, p. 19.

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as the next Pope, and Raphael, who stood in high favour at the Vatican, could hardly decline the new commission that was pressed upon him. More than this, the task was a congenial one, and called out all his sympathies.

Since the young painter of Urbino first came to Rome in 1508, he had lived in close intercourse with his fellow-citizen Bramante. Ever ready to learn, the wonderful youth had quickly absorbed the great architect's principles and caught his enthusiasm for classical art. As he wrote to Castiglione, soon after he was appointed architect of St. Peter's: "I long to find out more about the form of classical buildings, and yet I know not if my dreams may not end as the flight of Icarus." When he took that famous excursion to Tivoli with Bembo and Castiglione and their Venetian friends in April 1516, the Cardinal's *Vigna* may already have been in his mind. He found inspiration, there can be little doubt, in the stupendous fragments of Hadrian's villa, and reproduced certain features of the ruins in the gardens on Monte Mario. We have no positive information as to the date when the building of the villa was actually begun, but we know that considerable progress had been made by June 1519, and that the work was already exciting great interest at the Vatican. This we learn from a letter in which Castiglione, writing to Isabella, after describing the new

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Loggia as more beautiful than any work of modern times, adds the following words: "Raphael is also building a villa for the Reverendissimo Medici, which will be a most excellent thing. The Pope goes there very often. It is just under the Cross on Monte Mario."<sup>1</sup>

No site could have been finer or more appropriate than this which Raphael chose for Cardinal Giulio's villa on the eastern slopes of Monte Mario, about two miles north of the Borgo. "Here," in Vasari's words, "besides the beautiful view of the Campagna," with the Sabine hills and far peaks of Soracte in the distance, "were running water, woods, and a wide plain stretching along the Tiber as far as Ponte Molle, while on the other side the meadows reached to the gates of St. Peter's."<sup>2</sup> At the back the house was well protected from cold winds, while its position in front of the dark masses of woods made it a conspicuous object from the great Flaminian Way, the road by which most travellers entered Rome. Here, in the immediate neighbourhood of the Vatican, the Cardinal could enjoy cool shades and fresh breezes in the summer months, and would be able at the same time to entertain any distinguished guests who might visit the Eternal City.

A letter which Raphael addressed to Castiglione a few

<sup>1</sup> *Archivio Gonzaga, Mantova. Corrispondenza di Roma*, 1519.

<sup>2</sup> *Vite dei più eccellenti Pittori*, x. 283.

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months before his death, giving a full description of the Cardinal's *Vigna*, has unfortunately been lost, so that it is impossible to decide with any certainty what stage the work had reached when he died in April 1520. But there can be little doubt that by this time the building itself and its interior decoration were both well advanced. A large number of drawings made by Raphael's assistants for the villa and its grounds are still preserved in the Uffizi, and have been reproduced by Geymüller and Professor Hofmann in their excellent works on the subject.<sup>1</sup> No less than four of these artists belonged to the San Gallo family, that gifted race of architects and sculptors who originally took their name from one of the gates in Florence and all worked in Raphael's shop. Chief among them was Antonio di San Gallo, who came to Rome at the age of eighteen and spent forty-two years in the service of the Popes, working first as Raphael's assistant and eventually succeeding him as architect of St. Peter's. He and his brother Battista—surnamed *il gobbo*, assisted by their cousin Francesco and Bastiano, prepared the designs for the villa from their master's sketches, supplemented, after Raphael's habit, by instructions from his own lips. From these plans, and more especially from one drawn

<sup>1</sup> H. v. Geymüller, *Raffaello studiato come Architetto*; T. Hofmann, *Raphael als Architekt. La Villa Madama*. Cf. Halsey Ricardo, "The Cardinal Medici's Pleasure-house" (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, xviii. 6).

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by Battista under Raphael's direction, we are able to realise the magnificence of the original design, which was never wholly executed. The chief façade of the house, looking east, was remarkable for its simple and imposing character. The central portico was flanked by two wings each ending in a tower. On the south side, a stately hemicycle of Ionic pillars with niches for statues, intended for use as a theatre, looked towards the Borgo and St. Peter's, and, on the north, another fine portico opened on the gardens.

But the chief feature of the house was the great central Loggia, a magnificent hall with three arches supporting a lofty dome, entirely decorated with delicate reliefs in stucco and fresco, in the same style as the Vatican Loggia. The internal decoration of the villa was carried out by Giulio Romano and Giovanni da Udine. Giulio was Raphael's favourite pupil and chief assistant, who painted Madonnas and frescoes from his master's cartoons and acted as foreman of the vast workshop in which architects and sculptors, painters, engravers, mosaic-workers, wood-carvers, and gilders were employed to carry out the ideas of the master-mind. Giovanni was a young Venetian who, after Giorgione's death, had been recommended to Castiglione by Cardinal Grimani, and placed by him in Raphael's charge. Of all the great master's scholars, none had a larger share of his spirit or entered more fully into his thoughts than this lad from

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Friuli. Like all his comrades, he loved Raphael with devoted affection, and when he died more than forty years afterwards he begged with his last breath to be buried at his master's feet.

Giovanni it was who adorned the Vatican Loggia with fine stucco and painted reliefs, after the manner of the ancients, and brought this style to so rare a degree of perfection. While Giulio painted frescoes of Polyphemus and Galatea on the cupola of the eastern apse, and adorned the banquet-halls with friezes of *putti*, candelabra, and festoons of leaves and flowers, Giovanni decorated the vaulted ceiling of the great Loggia with graceful reliefs of classical myths, subjects from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and a hundred other exquisite fancies. All the gods of Olympus—Jupiter and Ganymede, Juno driving her peacocks, Neptune in his car, Apollo playing the lyre, Diana on her chariot, Bacchus with his panther—were introduced, and together with them, Tritons, Centaurs, Seasons, busts of poets, dancing girls, sphinxes and dogs, while the Medici arms—three feathers in a ring—appeared in the top of the central dome, surmounted by the Cardinal's hat. This alone would prove that the decorations of the villa, as well as the actual structure, were executed in the lifetime of Leo the Tenth, before the owner of the house himself succeeded to the Papacy.



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The delicate grace and charm of these reliefs, the boundless wealth of fancy and infinite variety of invention which they reveal, all seem to indicate how large a part of the work was due to Raphael. Some of the best authorities, Hittorf for instance, pronounce the stuccoes of Villa Madama to be superior in beauty of detail and composition to those of the Vatican Loggie, while Burckhardt declares that some of the motives can only have emanated from the master's brain.<sup>1</sup>

But what concerns us more nearly is that Raphael himself, without doubt, designed the gardens of Villa Madama. Of this we have certain proof in a drawing by his own hand in the Uffizi (No. 1355). Here, lightly sketched after his manner, are the outlines of the extensive gardens which he planned on the north-east of the house, where the ground falls towards the Tiber and Ponte Molle. We see how carefully he adapted his design to the configuration of the hillside by placing the gardens at three different levels. First of all, from the terrace in front of the façade, a double flight of steps led down to a square garden laid out in flower-beds and divided by pergolas, with one large central pavilion. From this parterre another broad stairway led to a round garden, adorned with loggias and clumps of cypresses, while the third and largest

<sup>1</sup> *Der Cicerone*, ii. 179.

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garden, shaped in the form of a circus, lay in the hollow of the valley. This lowest garden could be used as an arena for games and bull-fights, and contained an oval piece of water evidently imitated from the oblong basin excavated in the tufa of the Poecile at Hadrian's villa. From the slight indications given in Raphael's sketch, his pupils filled up the plans and produced designs in which the temples, loggias, stairways, fountains, and groves are clearly marked, and the names of the trees—oranges, beeches, and chestnuts—are written.<sup>1</sup>

Vasari speaks with admiration of the pavilions, loggie, rustic fountains, paved courts, fish-ponds, and other ornamental objects, all arranged in perfect order and harmony, which adorned the grounds of the Nymphæum, and dwells with especial delight on two beautiful fountains made by Giovanni da Udine. One of these, which is still in existence, stood at the end of the upper terrace and was decorated with an elephant's head, carved in marble, a basin adorned with stucco shells, and marine creatures, imitated from the reliefs of the recently discovered Temple of Neptune. The other was placed at the back of a rocky cave, in a dense thicket. Here Giovanni carved a lion's head gracefully wreathed in maidenhair and other grasses, "wrought with such delicacy and skill that this savage

<sup>1</sup> See No. 789 by Francesco di San Gallo, &c.

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spot was turned into an earthly paradise." So well pleased was the Cardinal with his work that he rewarded the artist with a canonry of St. Peter's.

Although Raphael's design was never entirely completed, all his contemporaries speak with enthusiasm of the wonderful beauty and enchantment of the villa on Monte Mario—" *luogo stupendo e delizioso*." His friend, the poet Tebaldeo, sang its praises in verse, and Giulio Romano introduced a view of the house and pillared hemicycle in the background of his fresco of "The Battle of Constantine at Ponte Molle." But, from the first, ill-luck attended Villa Madama. While it was still unfinished Raphael himself died, leaving his scholars orphaned and all Rome in tears. Before the end of the next year Leo the Tenth followed him to the grave and was succeeded by Adrian the Sixth. The works of the Vatican were stopped, Cardinal de' Medici retired to Florence, and artists and poets fled from a court "where genius," as Vasari said, "was no longer esteemed, and painters were left to die of hunger." Twice only during Adrian's brief reign do we find any mention of Raphael's villa. In the spring of 1523 the Florentine ambassadors, who came to Rome to congratulate the new Pope, spent two nights at the Vigna de' Medici, "a most beautiful palace," writes Pesaro, "outside the city gates," in order to allow the Venetian envoys to enter Rome first. The other occasion was a few weeks

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later, when Adrian the Sixth, in alarm at the discovery of Cardinal Soderini's plot to bring back the French, sent for Cardinal de' Medici to the Vatican. His Holiness was then persuaded to accompany the Cardinal to his *Vigna* outside the walls, where the whole day was spent in earnest consultation. By the end of the year Adrian was dead, and Cardinal de' Medici had been elected Pope with the title of Clement the Seventh. But money was scarce, and the new Pope had no time or thought to spend on his villa. "Unlike Leo," remarked the Venetian Foscari, "His Holiness has only been twice to La Magliana in the last two years, and has seldom had time to visit his own *Vigna*." Giulio Romano left Rome for Mantua in 1524, but Giovanni da Udine was again employed at the Villa—according to Vasari—"on things of small importance," probably the fountains and pavilions in the gardens. An inscription, however, bearing his name and the date 1525, has lately been discovered on a pillar in the south corridor, which seems to show that he was employed to complete the internal decorations.

In the spring of the same year a *festà* was given at the Pope's *Vigna* in honour of the Marchesa Isabella of Mantua. This distinguished lady, who had long been intimate with the Medici, and whose son held the office of Captain of the Church, arrived in Rome on the 2nd of March, just as the news of the battle of

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Pavia reached the Vatican. She witnessed the Pope's procession to the Lateran and was received by him in private audience. Every day she might be seen, accompanied by her fair maids-of-honour, and escorted by troops of courtiers, driving in her chariot through the streets—a sight, remarked Bembo, as novel as it was charming. She rode out to Roma *vecchia*, and, in spite of her advancing years, showed herself as indefatigable a sightseer as she had ever been. And, one lovely evening in May, the Pope's kinsman, Franceschino Cibò, invited her to supper at the *Vigna* of his Holiness on Monte Mario. "Yesterday," wrote Francesco Gonzaga, the Mantuan envoy, who had lately succeeded Castiglione, "Her Excellency was invited by Cavaliere Franceschino to supper at the Pope's *Vigna*, where he has a most beautiful palace, still unfinished, that was built when he was Cardinal, with some rooms completed and decorated in the most sumptuous and magnificent manner. The place is delicious and most enjoyable, and the site is the finest in the world." The ambassador proceeds to describe the elegant and abundant supper that was served by the Pope's servants on his own gold plate, the musical performances of various kinds, and other delightful entertainments, with which the ladies were amused during the three hours which they spent at the villa.

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But what pleased the Marchesa more than all were the superb antiques which adorned the gardens. One of these was a colossal Jove, lately dug up in Cardinal Armellini's *Vigna*, which, besides being of the finest marble, was evidently the work of a most excellent master. The head, it is true, was divided from the bust, the arms were gone, and the legs mutilated, but the subtle beauty of the head and beard excited the admiration of all the best connoisseurs, who pronounced it to be one of the finest things found in Rome for many years past. In a postscript written by her own hand, Isabella tells her son how honourably she was entertained at the Pope's villa, eating off His Holiness's own dishes and being waited on by his servants, while at the end of supper she was presented with a costly pair of gloves, and each of the other ladies received a casket of perfumes. "The place," she adds, "although unfinished, is most delightful and full of wonderful antiques which we longed to carry off to one of our own houses."<sup>1</sup>

Isabella was almost the last guest who saw Raphael's villa in its perfection. On the 2nd of May 1527 the Imperialist armies crossed Monte Mario and stormed the walls of the Borgo. Bourbon fell as he led the assault, and his wild hordes of German and Spanish soldiery were let loose on the defenceless city.

<sup>1</sup> A. Luzio in *Archivio storico lombardo*, x. 15.

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From the ramparts of Castell' Sant' Angelo, Pope Clement saw the thick columns of smoke rising above his beautiful villa. "This is Pompeo Colonna's revenge," he said, "for the castles and villages which I destroyed on his estates." The invaders had indeed set fire to the house, and considerable damage was done. The grand staircase and eastern portico were blown up, the marble hemicycle was partly destroyed, and the roof of the upper story fell in. Fortunately the great Loggia remained unhurt, and Giulio Romano's frescoes and Giovanni da Udine's stuccoes escaped injury. A temporary roof was hastily erected to prevent further damage, and, after the Pope's return to Rome in 1530, he employed Raphael's former colleague, Antonio di San Gallo, to restore the villa. But the grand staircase and upper story were never rebuilt, and the colonnade of the hemicycle was allowed to remain in ruins. After Clement the Seventh's death, in 1534, his villa was sold to the Canons of S. Eustachio, whose property it remained until the marriage of Paul the Third's nephew, Ottavio Farnese, to the Emperor Charles the Fifth's daughter Margaret. When the Imperial bride, Madama Margherita, came to Rome in 1538, she stayed at the villa before making her state entry into the city, and was so well pleased with the house that the Pope purchased it for her private use. Henceforth Margaret made Clement the Seventh's *Vigna* her country-house,

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and it became known by the name of Villa Madama. Even in her lifetime, however, many of its treasures were dispersed. The noble statue of Jupiter, which excited the admiration of both Isabella d'Este and Vasari, was given by the Farnese to King Francis the First, while they presented another very fine bust to Charles the Fifth's powerful minister, Cardinal de Granvelle. After Margaret's death in 1586, Villa Madama remained the property of the Farnese family, who added a few new rooms and domestic offices with a view to rendering the house more habitable. Cardinal Odoardo Farnese often spent the summer here, and gave at least one memorable entertainment at Villa Madama. This was in the closing years of the sixteenth century, when *Il Pastor Fido*, the pastoral drama of the Ferrarese poet, Battista Guarini, was performed in these grounds in the presence of a brilliant company of cardinals and princes. The last representative of the family, Elisabetta Farnese, became the wife of King Philip the Fifth of Spain. At her death Villa Madama passed to her son, Charles the Third, King of Naples, and still belongs to his Bourbon descendants. During the last 150 years Villa Madama has been abandoned by its owners and allowed to fall into ruin. The English traveller Eaton, who visited Rome in 1820, gives a melancholy picture of the state to which it was reduced by this time. The chapel had



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fallen in, several of the rooms were roofless, and the beautiful frescoes were mouldering on the mildewed walls—a truly pitiful condition!

Meanwhile, Raphael's unfinished villa had supplied a model for many other splendid pleasure-houses, and his original designs exerted a lasting influence on the development of villa architecture in Italy. Already in 1522, only two years after the master's death, the Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria, asked Castiglione to lend him Raphael's letter with the description of the Medici *Vigna*, in order that it might be a guide to him in laying out the house and grounds of the Villa Imperiale at Pesaro. Count Baldassare had unluckily left Raphael's letter in his house at Mantua, but referred the Duke to a cousin of the painter, Don Girolamo Vagnino, who had another copy with him at Urbino. With the help of this precious letter, Genga and his assistants were able to build and adorn the palace which Duchess Leonora reared in her lord's absence on the heights above Pesaro and the Adriatic. This villa, rich in marbles and frescoes, and surrounded with terraces, colonnades, orange and myrtle groves, was long the wonder and delight of all visitors to Pesaro, and Bembo declared that it was designed with greater skill and resembled antique villas more closely than any modern building that he had ever seen. At the same time, Giulio Romano, coming

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to Mantua with the remembrance of Villa Madama fresh in his mind, transformed the stables of the Gonzaga dukes on the marshes of the Tè into another splendid pleasure-house, adorned with similar frescoes and stucco reliefs.

Yet another palatial villa in North Italy was clearly modelled on the same pattern. This was Cricoli, the sumptuous house built by Leo the Tenth and Clement the Seventh's nuncio, the learned patrician Trissino, on the green hills near his home at Vicenza. Trissino's keen admiration for antique art led him to a close study of Vitruvius, and, fired by the examples of Renaissance architecture which he saw in Rome, he laid out his villa and gardens with so much taste and judgment that, in the words of a contemporary, they made the Muses forget Helicon and Parnassus. It is interesting to remember that this house at Cricoli, which certainly bears a close resemblance to Villa Madama, inspired the boy Palladio with his first passion for classical building, and started him on the career that was to affect the whole future course of architecture. So, as Geymüller has justly remarked, Raphael became the link that connects Bramante with Palladio, and Roman architecture with that of northern cities.

When, in the latter half of the century, the great outburst of gardening took place in Rome, the in-





*Photo: Brogi, Florence*

CARDINAL DE' MEDICI'S VILLA, ROME

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fluence of Raphael's creation still made itself felt. In some instances the general arrangement of the house and grounds, in others certain individual motives were borrowed from Villa Madama. Thus Antonio di San Gallo laid out the Vatican grounds with broad flights of steps and gardens at different levels, and in the hollow of the valley his successor, Pirro Ligorio, placed that jewel of loveliness, the Casino of Pope Pius the Fourth. While the example of a great central atrium was imitated in the Palazzo Farnese and the Pitti, the hemicycle and Nymphæum were reproduced in the villa on the Tiber which Pope Julius the Third built for himself outside the Porta del Popolo, within sight of Villa Madama. When, in the middle of the century, another Cardinal de' Medici planned the fair Casino on the brow of Monte Pincio, which still remains the least altered of all the great Roman villas, when he laid out the long pine and ilex avenues, and decorated fountains and alleys with the statues of Niobe and her children, with Giovanni da Bologna's bronze Mercury and the matchless Venus, he must have remembered Pope Clement's *Vigna* and have often gone there in search of new ideas. And can we doubt that Ippolito d'Este, the brilliant young Cardinal, thought of Raphael, whose name was a household word in his home at Ferrara, and of the villa on Monte Mario, before he chose the steep hill

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of Tivoli above the rushing waters of the Anio, to be the site of his famous pleasure-house? But already the great age was passing away and the *baroque* was fast gaining ground. Everywhere during the seventeenth century we find *châteaux d'eaux*, water-organs, girandolas, spouting giants, "wetting sports and all those artificial miracles" which were the inevitable features of a Roman garden in the days of our English travellers, Evelyn and Lassels. Such extravagances bore witness to the widespread perversion of taste and general decadence which prevailed on all sides, and could only be redeemed by the beauty of landscape and the luxuriant vegetation which is the glory of Italian gardens.

But we have travelled a long way from the Belvedere courts and Raphael's villa. It is now the saddest, most desolate spot in all Rome, this house which the Cardinal meant to be so gay. The marble statues are gone, those priceless antiques which filled Isabella's soul with wonder. The mighty pillars of the hemicycle are crumbling away, its empty niches are covered with moss and lichen. Hardly a trace remains of the gardens designed by Raphael with such elaborate care. The Nymphæum is a barren waste. Of all the temples and porticoes which once adorned the grounds only the modest roof of the Palazzina may still be seen, half-hidden among the cypresses in

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the valley. The walks along the hillside are overgrown with weeds; the very path leading up to the door is choked with nettles. And yet, in spite of all this neglect and decay, there is a strange fascination about the place. As we pace the wide terrace under the carved peristyle, and look up at the simple, majestic forms of the house, we feel the grandeur of Raphael's conception. There is a wealth of verdure and maiden-hair in the grottoes under the massive arches. The streams still gush from the marble head of the elephant fountain, and below, the clear green waters sleep in their oval basin. Rome and the dome of St. Peter's lie at our feet, and beyond are the vast plains and far hills of the Campagna. Within, there is the great Loggia with the miracles of Giovanni da Udine's decoration and Giulio's lovely frieze of cherub-heads on their pale blue ground. Here, art and nature still go hand in hand. The magic of Raphael's genius clings to these forlorn places and lends them an immortal charm.

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“Veri paradisi terrestri per la vaghezza del aere e del orto, luogo de ninfe e de semi-dei.”—ANDREA CALMO.

FEW Italians take greater pleasure in flowers and gardens than the people of Venice, the city in the sea. These dwellers in the lagoons, whose houses rise from the water's edge, and who seldom own more than a few feet of ground, are passionately fond of plants and blossoms. They cultivate every inch of soil within these narrow bounds, and grow vines and acacias round every *traghetto* and *osteria*. Their balconies are hung with wisteria and Virginia creeper, their roofs and window-ledges are gay with flower-pots. Every visitor to Venice remembers the glimpses of leafy arbours, of palm and myrtle and pomegranate, that charm his eyes as his gondola glides along the Grand Canal, the flowery paradise behind the iron gates of Ca' Foscari and Casa Rossa, the gardens of Palazzo della Mula and Venier, the trailing roses and white convolvulus of the loggia at Ca' Capello—that fair house which few of us to-day can see without a sigh for the gracious presence which has passed away. Even in the densely populated quarters of the city, at the back of the Carmine and San Panta-



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leone, spacious gardens are still to be found, where you can walk between rows of tall cypresses and pink oleanders, and discover ancient wells carved with the arms of Venetian families and overgrown with rose and jessamine, or, following Byron's example, pick the bunches of purple grapes which hang from the pergola overhead. The palace where Bianca Capello lived, still retains its stately Renaissance terraces, adorned with classical peristyles and moss-grown statues of nymphs and fawns, with avenues of ilex and cypress. And there are other gardens in the outlying parts of the city, where you can wander at will among tall Madonna lilies and bowers of honeysuckle, and look across the pearly lagoon to the distant shores of the Lido and the open sea, without hearing a sound but that of the waves lapping against the low sea-wall. But these, for the most part, are only fragments of what they once were, and we are reminded of the saying of our fellow-countryman, Lassels, who declared that in Venice gardens were as wonderful things as coaches, and complained that, looking down from the top of the high steeple, he only saw two places where there were any trees! This, however, was at the close of the seventeenth century, when wealthy Venetians were forsaking the city for villas on the mainland. In the great days of the Republic, when

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the lion of St. Mark floated over distant lands and cities, the gardens of Venice were famous for their extent and beauty. They excited the wonder and admiration of every traveller who saw "the triumphant city" for the first time—such, for instance, as Pietro Casola, the Milanese canon who came to Venice in 1494, on his way to Jerusalem, and waited a fortnight to sail with Agostino Contarini in the pilgrim-fleet for Jaffa.

"I cannot refrain," he writes in his Journal, "from repeating that nothing has surprised me more in this city than the many beautiful gardens which are to be seen here, especially, I must say, those belonging to the different religious Orders."<sup>1</sup>

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries these communities were as wealthy as they were numerous, and their churches and convents were among the most imposing buildings in the city. There were the Benedictines of S. Giorgio Maggiore, who numbered as many as two hundred in the palmy days when Cardinal Pole paid them a visit, and expressed equal admiration for their fine library and shady gardens. And there were the Augustinian canons attached to the well-known church now known as the Madonna dell' Orto, who had a spacious orchard full of apple and quince trees, and a hermitage on the island of S. Cristoforo, where, Casola tells us, they made white wax enough to supply all the

<sup>1</sup> Canon P. Casola's *Pilgrimage*, ed. by M. Newett, 142.

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churches and chapels in Venice. The ancient shrine of S. Francesco della Vigna took its name from the friars' vineyard, which was said to be the largest in Venice. This convent, in the poorest quarter of the city, was the home of the Osservanti brothers, and its gardens were a favourite haunt of S. Bernardino of Siena, the founder of the reformed Franciscan order, who enjoyed the peace and seclusion of this quiet retreat in his brief intervals of repose. Nor were the nuns without their gardens and orchards. Several of these communities were notorious not only for their riches and popularity, but for the freedom which they enjoyed. According to Casola, they might be divided into two classes, the nuns who were secluded, and those who ought to be secluded. Among the former were the holy sisters of the order of Santa Chiara, whose convent was attached to the church of "La Madonna dei Miracoli," that marvel of decorative beauty reared by Tullio Lombardi early in the sixteenth century. Among the latter were the Benedictine nuns of S. Zaccaria, who in Casola's words "let themselves be seen very willingly, both young and old,"<sup>1</sup> and the "Vergini" community of Augustinian nuns, whose convent stood opposite to S. Piero di Castello. The members of this order were all ladies of noble birth, who often appeared in

<sup>1</sup> Casola, 136.

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public, clad in sumptuous clothes and rich jewels, and gave festive entertainments to illustrious visitors, such as the Duchess of Ferrara and her daughters, Isabella and Beatrice d'Este.

Another community whose irregular practices gave rise to considerable scandal was that of S. Maria della Celestia, whose convent was destroyed in the last century to make room for the Arsenal. The "Zelestre" nuns, as they were commonly called, adopted white habits of a very becoming fashion, and went so far as to lay aside their veils and wear their hair in ringlets, a practice which drew down upon them a solemn rebuke from the Patriarch of Venice. In their convent Easter was kept with as great mirth and festivity as if it had been another Carnival, and on the election of a new abbess, in May 1509, they gave a *festà*, at which several young patricians were present and danced all night with the nuns, to the music of trumpets and fifes. Even in Venice such orgies could not be permitted within convent walls, and on the following day two of the young nobles who had led the revels at the "Zelestre" were summoned to appear before the Magnifico Bernardo Bembo, and duly reprimanded for the disturbance which they had caused.<sup>1</sup>

Most of these convents and gardens perished long ago, but the memory of one of them is still fresh in

<sup>1</sup> M. Sanudo, *Diarii*, viii. 307.

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the remembrance of many lovers of Venice. Close to the Public Gardens, on the little island of Sant' Elena, there stood an ancient church and convent with a graveyard, where the ashes of the Empress Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, were said to rest, and where many noble Venetian families had their burying-place. It was the most romantic spot in the world. Violets and periwinkles carpeted the grassy glades under the elms and pine groves, tall cypresses and slender marble columns framed in the cloister garden, where pomegranates and oleanders blossomed, and roses hung in profusion over the low red wall.

Far away to the north-west, across the open sea, we could see the mountains of Cadore, and beyond the spires of Venice rose the long range of Euganean hills. But campanile and convent garden, marble columns and cypress grove, have alike vanished before the relentless march of civilisation. An iron foundry has now taken their place, the smoke of furnaces blackens the pure atmosphere, and this once lovely isle, hallowed by the worship and memories of past ages, has been utterly ruined.

In the golden days of Venice, when Casola and De Communes wrote of her glories, the gardens of the patricians were as numerous as those of the religious orders. Thirty or forty years later, Sansovino counted above a hundred palaces which had gardens of their

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own.<sup>1</sup> Many of these were in the heart of the city, in the populous quarters of S. Canciano and Canareggio. Cardinal Grimani's palace, with its wonderful library and paintings, stood near S. Maria Formosa; Marc' Antonio Michieli, the Anonimo, who has left us a record of contemporary works of art in Venice and the neighbourhood, and was himself a distinguished collector, lived in the parish of S. Trovaso, and Bembo's kinsman, Donato Marcello, had a villa which was described as a *luogo felicissimo* in the Vignole—that cluster of green islets between Murano and the Lido which are still planted with vineyards. In the narrow Calle della Pietà, behind the church which holds Moretto's masterpiece, was the little garden belonging to Alessandro Vittoria, where the accomplished sculptor tended his favourite flowers, and planted all manner of sweet-scented herbs, and trained the roses with his own hands. The master's portrait-bust remained in the garden until the last century, and his ashes rest in a tomb, designed by himself, in the neighbouring church of S. Zaccaria. But most of the finest villas and largest gardens were to be found on the island of the Giudecca. Here the Doge, Andrea Gritti, the Barbaro brothers, the illustrious families of Mocenigo and Vendramini, had spacious gardens, where carnations from Damascus and other rare plants from the East blossomed among the

<sup>1</sup> F. Sansovino, *Venetia*, 369.

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roses and lilies, the citron and orange trees. The delicious verdure of the lawns round Benedetto Cornaro's house, in Pietro Aretino's words, "surpassed all the splendours of this favoured shore," while the same writer extols the gardens of the scholar-printer Francesco Marcolini in the same impassioned language. Marcolini himself was a very remarkable man, the chosen friend of Titian, of Bembo, and Sansovino, excellent alike as goldsmith, architect, printer, and poet. He was called in to alter the works of the clock on the tower of S. Stefano, and in 1545 Sansovino employed him to design the wooden bridge at Murano, which was only removed twenty-eight years ago. That he was a good gardener, too, we learn from the Aretine, who declares that in the summer heat, Marcolini's villa on the Giudecca was the most enchanting place in the whole world.

"Where else can you find deeper and cooler shades, more fragrant flowers, where else can you listen to the songs of endless birds which, with their Petrarchian music, refresh the weary soul and charm the tired senses to sleep?"<sup>1</sup>

In this same quarter of the Giudecca was the villa of Sante Cattaneo, with its stately columns and marble halls after the style represented in Bonifazio's well-known painting of "L'Epulone," or the parable of

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, i. 107 ; v. 122.

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Dives and Lazarus. A long marble colonnade led to a paved courtyard surrounded with fountains and grottoes enriched with shells and corals, and at the end of the garden was a pillared loggia, decorated with landscapes by the best Venetian painters and commanding a superb view of the lagoon towards Chioggia. "Thus," writes Martinioni, the continuator of Sansovino, "you are able at the same moment to enjoy the splendour of the sea and the beauties of mountains, woods, and flowers, in short of all that pleases both the eye and the heart of man."<sup>1</sup>

On the opposite side of Venice, at Birigrande, in the north-east quarter behind the great Dominican church of S. Giovanni and Paolo, was the house where Titian lived so long. There the great master received his illustrious patrons, the Dukes of Mantua and Ferrara, Cardinal de Granvelle, the Spanish prelate Pacheco, and Henry III, the last of the Valois kings. There Isabella d'Este came, still full of vitality in spite of her declining years, to examine the painter's latest works and endeavour to secure a Magdalen or a S. Jerome for her studio. In the summer of 1534, her son-in-law and daughter, the Duke and Duchess of Urbino, often rowed across from their house at Murano to visit the artist and give him sittings for their portraits. Here, more than thirty years after-

<sup>1</sup> F. Sansovino, *Venetia*, 370.





*Photo: Anderson, Rome*

A VENETIAN PLEASURE-HOUSE  
(Allegoria del "Ricco Epulone," Bonifazio)



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wards, young Giorgio Vasari came from Florence and found the old master of eighty-nine, brush and palette in hand, still painting pictures "worthy of immortality." The delightful situation of the house, the beauty of the garden along the edge of the lagoon, have been praised by many of his contemporaries, but in Titian's eyes its greatest charm was the prospect which it commanded over the mountains of Cadore. From his window the great master could look across the open lagoon to the blue hills of Ceneda, and on clear days could see the sharp peak of Antelao rising above his native home. Here, on summer evenings, he loved to entertain a few chosen friends—Sansovino, the great Tuscan architect, who had fled to Venice after the sack of Rome to become the master-builder of the Republic; the Veronese master, Sanmichele; the printer, Marcolini; the wonderful gem-cutter, Lodovico Anichino, and the witty and unscrupulous Pietro Aretino—at supper-parties, which lasted far on into the night. The Roman grammarian, Priscianese, has left us a graphic picture of one of these lively entertainments, at which he was a guest :

"On the first of August, the feast of Augustus, now known as the festival of the Chains of S. Peter," he writes, "I was invited to supper in a most beautiful garden, belonging to Messer Tiziano, an excellent painter, as all the world knows, and a person whose

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graceful courtesy would lend lustre to the most splendid banquet. Several other remarkable men were present on this occasion—Messer Pietro Aretino, that miracle of nature; Jacopo Tatti, called Sansovino, who is as renowned a sculptor as our host is a painter; and Messer Jacopo Nardi. The heat of the sun was still great, although the garden is shady, so, while the tables were being carried out and supper laid, we spent our time in looking at the admirable paintings which adorn the house, and in enjoying the rare beauty and delights of the garden, which lies on the sea-shore at the far end of Venice, looking towards the lovely island of Murano and other fair places. As the sun went down, the lagoon swarmed with gondolas full of beautiful women, and the sweet sounds of musical instruments and singing floated over the water and charmed our ears as we sat at our delightful supper till midnight. The garden is beautifully laid out, and excites universal admiration. The supper also was most excellent, rich in choice viands and rare wines. In short, nothing was lacking which could heighten the charm of the summer evening and the pleasure of the company. The fruit had just been placed on the table when your letter came, and Aretino's wrath was excited by your assertion of the superior excellence of the Latin tongue. He called for ink and paper, and was with difficulty restrained from committing his fierce invectives to writing. And so the supper ended, as gaily as it began!"<sup>1</sup>

The garden in which Titian gave these joyous supper-parties has been built over, and the noble tree

<sup>1</sup> Priscianese, *Della lingua romana*, Ticozzi *Dizionario*, iv. 79.

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which he introduced into his altar-piece of S. Pietro Martire, and which was still standing fifty or sixty years ago, has been cut down. But another charming garden in this quarter still remains, and has been little changed since the days of Titian and Aretino. It belongs to the Villa Contarini del Zaffo, so called because its owners were patrons of the galley which yearly bore pilgrims for the Holy Land to the port of Jaffa. This house was the birthplace of Gaspare Contarini, the distinguished scholar and statesman, whom his friend Bembo justly called the pillar of the Church and the brightest ornament of the Republic, who to the joy of his fellow-citizens was in his last days made a Cardinal by the enlightened Farnese Pope, Paul III. The Cardinal's portrait still hangs in the *salone* of the villa, with the finely painted roof, and his bust adorns the family chapel where his ashes rest, in the neighbouring church of the Madonna del Orto. The garden of Villa Contarini, which three hundred years ago was one of the most beautiful in Venice, has been carefully reconstructed by its present owners on the lines of the original design, and affords a typical example of a Venetian Renaissance garden. The formal parterres are divided by yew and hornbeam hedges, and adorned with fountains and red brick exedra, and at the end of the cypress avenues three gateways with finely moulded pilasters and

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cornices open on to the blue lagoon. Through these arched portals we look out across the shining waters to the white towers and dark cypresses of San Michele, and the distant furnaces of Murano. In one corner of the gardens stands the Casa degli Spiriti, a pavilion where festive gatherings were held in days of old, and the midnight echoes of the revellers' voices, borne across the waters, gave rise to the legend that the house was haunted. As we look from the steps of Villa Contarini at the dense cloud of smoke rising from the chimneys of Murano on the opposite shore, it is difficult to realise that this island was once famous for its sumptuous pleasure-houses and gardens. Yet so it was in the days of Gaspare Contarini and Pietro Bembo, of Titian and Aretino. Then poets and travellers alike extolled Murano as the most delightful place in the world, dear above all to scholars and thinkers, and meet to be the home of nymphs and goddesses. They praised its balmy breezes and sparkling fountains, its fields of musk and damask roses, of violets and narcissus, its groves of citron and orange, and beds of sweet-smelling mint, of rosemary and lavender.

"Much more," exclaims Casola, "might be said of Murano, and of its thousand delights, and how the island is surrounded by waters and has the most

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beautiful gardens in Venice, but I will leave something for others writers to tell.”<sup>1</sup>

A few months before the Milanese Canon wrote these words, Murano was the scene of a splendid fête given by Caterina Cornaro, Queen of Cyprus, in her villa gardens, in honour of Beatrice d'Este, the young Duchess of Milan, whose coming as her lord's ambassador was celebrated with great honour by the Doge and Signory. And in the same year Queen Caterina received Beatrice's sister, the Marchesana Isabella, when she paid her first visit to Venice at Ascension-tide, and showed this accomplished lady the rare flowers and fruits that were sent her from Cyprus. When, seventeen years afterwards, Caterina died, and was buried with due pomp in the church of the Apostoli, the funeral oration was pronounced by an eloquent young Venetian patrician, Andrea Navagero, who was one of her neighbours at Murano. This fine scholar and distinguished public servant, who held the office of Librarian and Historiographer to the Republic of Venice, and went as Ambassador to Spain and France, had a passionate love of gardening. There was a vein of melancholy in his nature which made him sigh for peace and repose in the midst of his political labours, and escape, whenever he had a chance, from the din and turmoil of the city to enjoy the rural

<sup>1</sup>.Casola, 142.

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delights dear to his soul. It was "to please Messer Andrea" that Bembo and Castiglione joined Raphael and their Venetian friends one spring morning, and went on a memorable excursion to Tivoli, there to explore the ruins of Hadrian's villa, and walk by the rushing waters of Arno, in the dewy orchards sung by the Latin poet. And Navagero was never so happy as when he could spend a week with one or two chosen friends in his own garden at Murano. Here he devoted himself to the cultivation of flowers and plants with the same ardour which he showed in the study of letters, and clipped his yews and pruned his roses as carefully as he composed his Latin verses or edited Virgil or Lucretius for the Aldine Press. An eloquent description of Messer Andrea's garden has been left us by Christophe Longueil, the Flemish scholar, who was driven by the jealousy of the Roman scholars at Leo X's Court to take refuge at Padua.

"I have been at Venice for a fortnight," wrote Longolio, as he was called by his Italian friends, to Bembo in June 1520, "and spent a week of the greatest enjoyment with our dear friend, Messer Andrea Navagero, in his country house at Murano. The garden belonging to this villa was a very pleasant sight, since all the trees in the orchard and plantations are laid out in the form of a quincunx."

This method of planting trees, to which Sir Thomas Browne alludes as "the quinquuncial lozenge in use



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among the ancients," consisted in setting trees in a square with a fifth in the centre, and repeating this device again and again, so that whichever way you turned your eyes, parallel alleys might be seen.

"All the trees and hedges," the writer continues, "are clipped in different shapes, and are exquisite examples of topiary art. The sight indeed greatly exceeded my highest expectations. The apple trees are all planted in regular rows, at discreet intervals, and have grown with amazing rapidity, since they were put in the ground by our Navagero himself, only a few months ago. Nothing could be more beautiful in shape and colour, nothing sweeter in smell and taste, or more excellent in size and variety, than the fruit which this orchard bears. For Messer Andrea, as you know, takes the greatest delight in rural pursuits, and is more industrious than most agriculturists, devoting the same diligence and careful attention to his garden that he does to our own art."<sup>1</sup>

In his reply, Bembo expressed the greatest satisfaction at Longolio's account of Messer Andrea and his garden.

"What you wrote of Navagero," he says, "was very pleasing to me. The man is admirable, because he does not cultivate learning and gardening in solitude, but shares both his studies and rural pleasures with his friends. I am delighted to hear that he is spending the summer in his garden at Murano, and feel no

<sup>1</sup> C. Longolio, *Epistola*, i. 108.

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doubt that much fruit will spring from those joyous days passed in the shade of the citron-trees which he brought from the shores of Benacus.”<sup>1</sup>

Six years later, in April 1526, during Navagero's absence in Spain, Bembo himself visited the villa at Murano, and addressed the following letter to his generous host :

“I have been staying for the last fortnight in your own pleasant villa, at the invitation of our Ramusio”—the son-in-law and intimate friend of Messer Andrea—“and have enjoyed myself so much that I am quite sorry to go. We have talked of you very often, as you may imagine, in the most affectionate terms. I rejoice to hear the great and singular renown which you have acquired on this your first foreign embassy. Every one praises you so much that I can only say, ‘Go on as you have begun, and you may be sure that the State will be grateful to you, and that you will be remembered in days to come, not only as a great and illustrious citizen, but as having had no equal among the servants of the Republic.’ Keep well and remember me to our dear Messer Baldassare Castiglione. From your Murano. April 7, 1526.”<sup>2</sup>

In another letter, addressed to Gian Battista Ramusio, his dear and too courteous friend, Bembo thanks Heaven that Messer Andrea has escaped the perils of the sea and reached Spain in safety.

<sup>1</sup> P. Bembo, *Epistol. fam.*, v. 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Lettere famigliari di M. Pietro Bembo*, ii. 112.

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“I see,” he adds, “that this pilgrimage will be pleasant to him, if only it enables him to discover new plants and other rare things, and as he says himself, I am sure that he will return laden with them.”<sup>1</sup>

The letters which Navagero wrote to his son-in-law during his absence, abound in descriptions of the wonderful gardens which he saw in Spain, and which he confesses are even more beautiful than those in Italy. The Moorish Alcazar at Seville seemed to him the most perfect of summer palaces, and its lovely *patio*, planted with shady orange and lemon trees, and watered with running streams from marble fountains, was the most delicious place which he had ever seen. In company with his noble friend, Count Baldassare, he visited the gardens of the Certosa on the banks of the Guadalquivir; and as they lingered in the pillared loggia among myrtle groves fragrant with the scent of roses, he envied the fortunate Carthusian friars who need only leave these enchanted regions to go to Paradise. From Granada he wrote glowing descriptions of the Alhambra halls and the Court of Lions, with its marvellous tiles and myrtle trellis, “a place,” he remarked, “where it is always cool and fresh on the hottest day.” Leaving the Alhambra by a little door, he and Castiglione climbed the heights of the Generalife, and sat in a balcony cut out of the myrtle

<sup>1</sup> Cicogna, *Iscrizioni*, vi. 305.

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grove, watching the rabbits peeping out of the bushes, and looking down on the foaming waters of the Dario in the gorge below.

“Nothing is lacking,” wrote Messer Andrea, “to complete the charm and perfection of this spot, save the presence of a scholar who would enjoy its beauty. Such a man might live here in peace and quietness, engaged in those studies that would make him happy, and in which he would be content to spend the rest of his life, careless of wealth or fame.”<sup>1</sup>

The quarters occupied by the Ambassadors at Granada were in the upper city, which was still inhabited by the Moors, whose carefully cultivated, well-watered gardens filled Messer Andrea with admiration. But the period of forty years’ grace, granted them by the conquerors, had almost expired, and in a few months the Inquisition was to be set up in Granada. Already many of the wealthier Moors were gone to Africa, and the kind-hearted Venetian looked with a sigh at these gardens of myrtle and musk roses, and thought sorrowfully of the doom which hung over them.

But none of these brilliant and varied scenes could make Navagero forget his own gardens at Murano and Selve, his other villa in the Trevigiana district.

“Sweetest Ramusio,” he wrote from Toledo, “I care more for my gardens at Murano and Selve than for

<sup>1</sup> Navagero, *Viaggio in Spagna*, 20-25.

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anything else in the world. You will wonder that I have time to think of them in the midst of all my labours, but I am a true Epicurean and should like to spend my whole life in a garden. Therefore, as you love me, dear Ramusio, take care of these beloved groves while I am absent from home, for this is the truest service that you can render me.”<sup>1</sup>

No joy is greater, he often repeats, than to receive his son-in-law's letters, at the end of a long and tedious journey, and to hear how his trees and plants are doing. From Barcelona he sent some caronba trees to be planted at Murano, and from Seville he forwarded seeds of sweet orange and of a flowering shrub called *ladano*, with a blossom between a cistus and a white rose, as well as some curious roots called *batate*, which had lately been brought from the Indies, and were good to eat, tasting something like chestnuts. There was also a new and delicious fruit, apparently a banana, not unlike a melon, but with a flavour that was something between a quince and a peach, of which Navagero sent home specimens, together with a beautiful dead bird—called a bird of paradise, also from the New World—which was to be given to Gaspare Contarini. There are frequent allusions in these letters to a certain Frate Francesco, who seems to have been his head gardener and had charge of both his gardens in his absence.

<sup>1</sup> D. Atanagi, *Lettere*, 676.

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"Tell the Friar," he writes, "that new trees must be planted in the grove at Murano, and let him take care to see that they are placed in formal rows at some interval, and above all, let him put in plenty of roses between the grove and the boundary wall, and see that they are trained to grow on a trellis, after the fashion which I admire in Spain. And see that in the autumn he goes to Selva, to see how the laurels are growing, and if the fruit trees have done better than they did last year. And I beg of you, my dear Ramusio, to adorn your own villa with fair trees, so that when I return home we may enjoy what remains to us of life with our books in the shade of our own groves."<sup>1</sup>

But the peace and leisure for which the scholar-poet yearned never came. At the end of four years he at length returned to his beloved home, but he had hardly set foot on Venetian soil than he received orders to go to France as Ambassador to King Francis I. Before he had been at the French Court three months he fell ill of fever and died at Blois on the 8th of May, 1529, to the infinite grief of his friends in Venice. He was buried by his own wish in the church of S. Martina at Murano, in a grave touching the garden which he loved. Poets and scholars lamented him in elegant Latin verse, and Sadoletto linked Messer Andrea's name with that of his friend Castiglione in a memorable letter, deploring the heavy loss which Italy had sustained

<sup>1</sup> Atanagi, 668.

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by the death of two of her noblest sons.<sup>1</sup> "Poor Navagero," wrote Bembo, "was a most rare being, who could not fail to do honour to his country. If he had been an ignorant fool, he would have lived."<sup>2</sup>

Another distinguished friend of Navagero and Bembo, who owned a villa at Murano, was Trifone Gabriele, whom Ariosto calls the "new Socrates." So great was his reputation for learning that at the prayer of Cardinal Pole and Bembo, the Pope released him from a rash vow made in early youth to take priest's orders, and abandon the study of pagan literature. Trifone would never accept any office or preferment from the State, and when he was offered the Patriarchate of Venice, replied in the following words :

"Siano degli altre le mitre e le corone,  
Rura mihi et rigus placeant in vellibus anmes."

He loved the woods and waters of his villa in the green Euganean hills, and planted pergolas of rose and honeysuckle, vines and jessamine in his garden at Murano. Here, in the happy days before Messer Andrea was sent abroad, he and Trifone studied the MS. of Bembo's *Prose*, and revised the text of the classics which they edited for Aldus. Like Navagero, Trifone shared his good things freely with poorer scholars, and threw open his gardens to the members of the Aldine

<sup>1</sup> Sadoletto, *Epist. fam.*, 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Lettere*, v. 65.

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Academy. When, in 1525, the Vicentine poet, Giangiorgio Trissino, came to Venice as Papal Legate, he took a house in the parish of San Donato at Murano, and spent much of his time in Trifone's society. On summer mornings the Legate would join the youthful scholars who met daily at Trifone's villa, and held learned converse with them in his friend's garden, or in those of Navagero and Alvise Priuli. These discussions were often prolonged to a late hour, and after vespers the enthusiastic band of scholars might still be seen pacing up and down the shores of the lagoon, drinking in every word that fell from their teacher's lips.

But even Murano could not satisfy the new passion for rural delights which had sprung up among these Venetian humanists. They sought the hills and forests of the mainland, the "Marca Amorosa" of Treviso, the mountain region of Castelfranco under the dolomite peaks which Gian Bellini and Cima were never tired of painting, where Giorgione was born and Titian had his home. Or they settled in the pleasant district of the Euganean hills, where Arquà and Monselice and half a dozen other bright little towns nestle among the woods. Trifone Gabriele found the seclusion which he loved in his villa at Ronchi, and Bembo spent the happiest years of his life in his "*dolce Noniano*," that delightful country-house between



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Padua and Cittadella, far from the noise and smoke of Rome. Farther still from Venice, in the distant hills of Friuli, Bembo's kinsman, Giorgio Grademigo, spent the happiest days of his life in a villa at Cividale.

"Oh, how I enjoy my summer here!" he writes. "I spend the whole evening, until two hours after sunset, walking about the fields, and the dawn of day never finds me in my bed. For at Cividale the sky is bluer, and the sun and stars seem to me to shine more brightly than in any other place on earth. Sickness is unknown there, and melancholy flies away."<sup>1</sup>

A curious treatise on Venetian villas was written by the Florentine Antonio Doni, originally a Servite friar, who gave up his vows and sought refuge in Venice, where he became intimate with several of the above-named scholars, and spent his last years in a villa at Monselice. The writer divides Venetian country-houses into four classes—first, the superb palaces laid out on a vast scale by wealthy patricians, with frescoed halls and colonnades, chapel and cloisters; secondly, the more modest villas, where tired officials and over-worked scholars sought repose and leisure in the brief intervals which they could snatch from their public duties; thirdly, the houses and estates bought by merchants as a profitable investment; and fourthly, the *podere* cultivated by farmers and peasants, who made a living out of the soil. The villas of Bembo and

<sup>1</sup> L. Dolce, *Lettere*, ii. 467.

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Trifone were good instances of the second class, while a splendid example of the first class is still to be seen in the palatial Villa Maser, which the Barbaro brothers employed Palladio to rear on a spur of the Julian Alps, and brought Paolo Veronese and his pupils to adorn with frescoes that are still in existence.

On the heights of Asolo, in the dolomite country, was the stately home where the widowed Queen of Cyprus, Caterina Cornaro, held her court, and made the foremost poets and scholars of the day welcome. The massive tower of her Castello still rises above the picturesque streets of the old mountain town, and from its battlements we look down through a tangled mass of briar-rose and acacia on the Lombard plain stretching far away to the wide horizon. Little is left to-day of these wonderful gardens where courtiers and maidens sang and danced, and talked of love and poetry through the long summer days, but Bembo has given us some idea of their beauty in the poem of *Gli Asolani*, which he wrote in the first years of the new century, and dedicated to the Duchess Lucrezia. In language recalling Boccaccio's immortal prose, the young Venetian has told us how he arrived at this "*vago e piacevole Castello*" standing on a far ridge of the Alps, above the Trevigiana, when the marriage-feast of one of the Queen's maidens was being celebrated. The wedding was over, the guests



*Photo: Anderson, Rome*

CATERINA CORNARO, QUEEN OF CYPRUS

(After Titian)



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were gone, the Queen had retired to her rooms, and of all the company three youths and three maidens remained sitting in the marble loggia. And "since sleeping after meals is not healthy, and the summer days were too good to be wasted in slumber," one of the cavaliers, Gismondo, proposed that they should go out into the gardens and tell each other stories, resting on the grassy lawns. His companions agreed gladly, and the speaker led the way.

"The garden," continues Bembo, "was of rare and marvellous beauty. A wide and shady pergola of vines ran down the centre, and the walls on either side were concealed by thick hedges of box and juniper, while laurels arching overhead afforded the most refreshing shade, and were all so carefully cut and trimmed that not a single leaf was out of place. None of the walls could be seen, only at the end of the pergola, above the garden gate, two windows of dazzling white marble let in a view of the distant plains. Down this fair pathway the little troop walked, sheltered by the dense foliage from the fiery rays of the sun, until they reached a little meadow at the end of the garden. Here the grass was as fine in colour as an emerald, and all manner of bright flowers sprang up on the fresh green sward, and just beyond was a shady grove of laurels, not clipped or trained like the others, but allowed to wander at will. In their midst was a beautiful fountain, from which a jet of clear water from the mountain-side fell with joyous sound into a marble basin, and thence flowed in gently

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murmuring rills over the whole garden. Here the fair maid Berenice paused. 'Madonna,' said her cavalier Gismondo, 'shall we rest awhile? We could hardly find a more delicious spot, for here the grass is greener and the flowers are gayer than anywhere else. The trees will shelter us from the sun, and the murmur of the running waters and the romantic charm of these shades will dispose each of you to talk of what you like best, while we will gladly listen.' So the three youths and three maidens sat down in a circle on the lawn, on the banks of the stream flowing from the fountain in the laurel grove, and sang love songs and recited verses. And Berenice told the old tale of Dido, and Gismondo sang the praise of Love, saying, that as in spring the air is full of light and song, and woods and valleys, mountains and rivers all laugh for joy, so when Love takes hold of the heart our looks and thoughts are full of rapture, and the whole being of man rejoices. So the day wore on in light and happy converse until the trumpet gave the signal for renewed feasting and dancing, and youths and maidens rose, not without a sigh, to return to the palace."<sup>1</sup>

Another famous villa in this same district of Asolo, "on the borders of La Magna," was that of Messer Alvise Priuli at Treville. This *ricca e grandissima casa*, worthy as Bembo wrote, of the noble owner, was built by Palladio, and adorned with frescoes by the Tuscan master, Francesco Salviati. The interior was furnished in the richest style, the polished marble floors shone

<sup>1</sup> *Gli Asolani*, 6-8.

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like mirrors, the bedsteads and chairs were carved and painted, the carpets and hangings were of costly Oriental stuffs. In the words of the poet Calmo, "This was a palace where a monarch might fitly make his home, and Jove himself might worthily be received." Priuli's lifelong friend, Cardinal Pole, was often his guest at Treville, "and wrote many letters to Messer Alvise"—*ex villâ tuâ*. "This angelic spirit," as Cardinal Contarini called the saintly English prelate, was always happy in the country, and in one of his letters from Treville, he says that he may well call Priuli's villa "a Paradise, because of its situation in these delicious hills, and even more because of the friends whose company I am enjoying." When Priuli came in his turn to pay the Cardinal a visit at the monastery of Carpentras, Pole wrote to their mutual friend, saying that Messer Alvise was most diligent in the study of philosophy and agriculture, and thinks of turning horticulturist, "in which idea he is encouraged by the beautiful garden belonging to these good Fathers, and their truly excellent gardener."<sup>1</sup>

Another interesting Venetian, like Priuli, the friend of Bembo and his circle, was Alvise Cornaro, whose Treatise on the Simple Life (*La Vita Sobria*) became first known to English readers through Addison's paper in the *Spectator*. This scholar and philosopher lived to be

<sup>1</sup> Poli, *Ep.* ii. 162.

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over a hundred, and his portrait, painted by El Greco in extreme old age, may be seen in the National Gallery, where it still goes by the name of a "St. James." He wrote his famous book at the age of eighty-three, and describes in its pages how, owing to careful and temperate habits, he has kept his full powers of body and mind, and can mount a horse without help, and enjoy walking and travelling, and take part in the pleasures of the chase, as if he were still in the prime of life. A wealthy and liberal patron of art, Cornaro had a fine house in Padua, close to the church of Il Santo, which he built in 1524, from the designs of the Veronese architect Falconetto. The painters Domenico Campagnolo and Girolamo del Santo, who worked with Titian in the Scuola del Santo close by, were employed to decorate the interior, and, according to Michieli, the painted ceilings were executed by Domenico Veneziano from the cartoons of Raphael. Unfortunately this once splendid Palazzo has now been entirely rebuilt, and all that remains of Messer Alvise and Falconetto's creation is the elegant garden-house, with its open loggia and charming decorations in white stucco and fresco, in the style of the Vatican Loggie. Besides his town house, Cornaro built two fine villas, the one at Este in the Euganean hills, the other at Codevigo in the plains near the mouth of the Brenta. Their venerable owner attributed the robust health which he enjoyed in his old age in great part to his love



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of gardening and of all out-door pursuits, and congratulated himself that, more fortunate than most of his contemporaries, he had lived long enough to enjoy the houses which he had built and the gardens which he had planted.

"Each September and October," he writes, "I spend at my villa, which stands in the most beautiful part of the Euganean hills, and is adorned with garden and fountains and a fine loggia, where I entertain my friends, and occasionally give large hunting-parties. Later in the year I go to my other villa in the plains at Codevigo, on the shores of the Brenta. This house is built in the form of a quadrangle, with the river running through the gardens, and contains ample accommodation for my family and guests as well as a chapel and altars for the worship of God."<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary Venetian writers describe the gardens of Villa Cornaro at Este, as being among the finest of their kind. They wax eloquent over the pergolas and fountains, the porticoes and antique statues, the urns and vases with which the grounds were adorned, and the excellent grapes and wine which the vineyards produced. There was a theatre in which admirable concerts were given, and the popular actor Ruzzante frequently appeared in his own pastoral comedies.<sup>2</sup> But Messer Alvise was above all a practical man.

<sup>1</sup> A. Cornaro, *La Vita Sobria*.

<sup>2</sup> Lovarini in *L'Arte*, ii. 199.

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He devoted much time and money to agricultural experiments, and introduced the system of the *mezzadria* or metayer system among the peasants on his estates, with the happiest results. More than this, he spent large sums in building bridges, making new roads, and draining the marshes of the Brenta, being convinced that he could do the State no better service than to reclaim these waste lands and make them fit for cultivation. Happily, Alvise Cornaro's example was followed by many of his countrymen, and the last half of the sixteenth century witnessed an extraordinary outburst of activity in this direction. The ever-increasing passion for *villeggiatura* life led wealthy patricians to build pleasure-houses all along the shores of the Brenta, and in the course of the next hundred years this fertile district between Padua and Mestre became practically a suburb of Venice.

When, in 1574, the last of the Valois kings, Henry III, visited Venice on his return from Poland, he was lost in wonder at the splendours of the palaces—*luoghi di delizie*—which lined the banks as he rowed down the Brenta in his barge. The Palazzo Malcontenta, where the royal guest was entertained on this occasion, was built for the Foscari in the sixteenth century by Palladio, and decorated with frescoes by the painter Zelotti. Its stately Ionic

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portico commanded a superb view of the Alps, and looked down on a piazza surrounded by colonnades, which rivalled those of St. Mark's. The memory of the fêtes given by the Contarini in honour of the French monarch is still preserved in the noble frescoes with which Tiepolo adorned the ceilings of the villa of Lions at Mira, and which have now found a home in the Musée André in Paris. There we may see the long procession of richly decorated barges which used once to float down the stream, and the delicious gardens with terraces and flights of steps that led to the pleasure-houses along its banks. The Mocenigo family owned a fine villa at Dolo, which boasted a façade painted by Varotari, while the palace of the Pisani at Strà was even more imposing, with its vaulted halls decorated by Tiepolo and its vast park and gardens.

To-day all these splendours have vanished like a dream. As you float in a gondola down to Brenta, between banks of vivid green, under a sky of still more radiant blue, ruinous houses crumbling to decay and a few squalid peasant huts are the only buildings that meet the eye. The glorious loggia of Malcontenta is a mere shell. A few desolate ilex groves and cypress avenues are all that remain of the once famous gardens at Strà. Here and there you see a pair of ragged black-eyed children peering out

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between the delicate marble shafts of an arched window, and a pink oleander flowering overhead. Further on, you may come on a clump of cypresses and a carved marble bench standing in the midst of a field of young wheat, and beyond these discover the pillars of a gateway mossy with age, bearing the shields and armorial bearings of some ancient family. But the hinges of the gate are rusty and the path through the cornfield leads nowhere. A profound melancholy broods over the scene. Villas and gardens alike have vanished. The men and women who lived there are dead and gone. Their names, even the most illustrious among them, have been forgotten, and the very site of Bembo's "*dolce Noniano*" is unknown. Only the nightingales which charmed his poet-soul still sing in the silence of the summer night, and the roses which Navagero loved hang in clusters over the low red wall of the lagoon. Nature renews her youth, and year by year the spring returns with her perennial charm.

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"Cur valle permutem Sabina Divitias operosiores?"

HORACE.

PIETRO BEMBO was a typical Italian humanist. His whole life was governed by two ruling passions—the love of letters and of natural beauty. He was ambitious and greedy of gain, never tired of accumulating lucrative posts and rich benefices, but wealth and dignities in his eyes were only means to the end in view, steps in the ladder to the attainment of that blessed leisure which was the most desirable thing on earth. So he undertook hard and distasteful work, and toiled in law-courts and offices, that he might gain the power to be idle and to enjoy Nature and his beloved books in undisturbed peace. And since the only way in which a poor scholar could obtain independence and freedom from care was by entering the service of some noble patron, he went to the Court of Urbino with only forty ducats in his pocket, and, in spite of the remonstrances of his relatives and friends, remained there several years. "Let them say what they choose," he wrote to his brother at Venice, "they are fools who think themselves wise and imagine that

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they can manage the lives of others better than their own. You need not be afraid that the charms of these ladies will make me forget myself. For I am not as great a fool as your Solomons would make out.”<sup>1</sup>

The issue proved him to have been right. From Urbino he passed, after Duke Guidobaldo's death, to Rome, and through the influence of his friend Giuliano de Medici became secretary to Pope Leo X. But wherever he was, at Ferrara with Duchess Lucrezia, or at Urbino with Elisabetta Gonzaga and Emilia Pia, young Bembo was never so happy as when he could escape to the country for a few weeks. “I write to your Highness,” he says in a letter to Lucrezia from Ercole Strozzi's villa, “sitting at an open window, looking out on the sweet and fresh landscape and commend myself to you as many times as there are leaves in the garden.”<sup>2</sup> In the Council hall at Venice, he confesses that he sighed for a little shepherd's hut on the Apennine slopes, whence he could look down on the towers of Urbino; and the letters of his adored Duchess came to him like a refreshing breeze from those dear hills. This passionate delight in country sights and sounds, in the song of the first nightingale and the coming of the swallow, in the daily wonder of sunrise and sunset, and the miracle of the spring,

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, ii. 17. The quotations from Bembo's *Letters* are taken from the edition published at Verona in 1552.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 116.



*Photo: Anderson, Rome*

LUCREZIO BORGIA, DUCHESS OF FERRARA  
(Pinturicchio)





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breaks out perpetually in his writings, alike in prose and poetry. His youthful work, *Gli Asolani*, which he wrote at the Court of Ferrara, opens, as we have seen, with a charming description of Queen Caterina's palace garden on the heights of Asolo, with its close-clipped hedges and marble loggia looking out on the Lombard plains. In his Roman days, we know how keenly Messer Pietro enjoyed excursions into the Campagna, and how he rode out to Tivoli with Raphael and Count Baldassare and the Venetian patrician Andrea Navagero, to see all that was worth seeing, both new and old. And in the last years of his long life, it was still the aged Cardinal's greatest pleasure to take a walk outside the Porta del Popolo, under the wooded slopes of Monte Mario.

But the place which Bembo loved best in the world was his own villa, in the district of Cittadella near Padua—" *la mia dilettevole villetta nel Padovano*," as he calls it repeatedly in his correspondence. This was a country house in the parish of Santa Maria di Non, not far from Castelfranco and Asolo, which took its name of Villa Bozza from a former owner, a valiant soldier of fortune, known as Bozza da Nona. It stood in the midst of pleasant gardens and meadows, watered by the river Brenta and its tributary, the Piovego, a small stream that flowed under the villa windows. About 1475 this little property was bought by Pietro's father, Bernardo Bembo, a noble Venetian who held high

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office under the Republic. He was successively Ambassador at Florence—where his son Pietro was born in 1470—and at Ferrara, but is chiefly remembered by the tomb which he raised to Dante's memory while he was Podestà of Ravenna. Whenever Messer Bernardo could spare a few weeks from his official duties, he took refuge with his wife and children at Villa Bozza, and there Pietro spent the happiest days of his boyhood. In his Latin Dialogue *Etna*, a record of the journey which he paid to Sicily to study Greek under Lascaris, the scene is laid at the Villa. We have a charming picture of the two scholars, father and son, sitting in the cool shelter of the atrium inside the house, on a hot August day, discussing the eruption of the volcano and all the wonderful things which the young man had seen in Sicily. Presently the burning heat of the sun compels them to retire into the library, where they sit at ease and turn over the pages of their favourite tomes, until the sun sinks in the western sky and they stroll out into the woods by the river, listening to the pleasant murmur of running water. "Thus, with always new delight, we return to our beloved Nonianum."

In June 1519 Bernardo died suddenly, and his son was summoned to Venice, to find himself face to face with a critical state of affairs. His father had left heavy debts and three orphan grandchildren, the

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children of his daughter Antonia, for whom Pietro had to provide ; while, to add to his difficulties, a dishonest factor of an estate which he held under the Knights of St. John at Bologna, had absconded with 600 florins. Such were the straits to which he was reduced that he feared he must sell his beloved Villa. "My father's death," he wrote to his old friend, Cardinal Bibbiena, "has involved me in such financial difficulties that I hardly know which way to turn. And yet, if possible, I would preserve that delightful Villetta, of which I have so often told you—I mean my dear Noniano."<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately this catastrophe was averted and Bembo managed to raise a dowry of 3000 florins for his eldest niece, Marcella, whom he married to his kinsman, Gian Matteo Bembo, an able young official, "not rich, but sufficiently well-to-do and highly esteemed in the city." Marcella's sisters went back to their convent, to remain there until a dowry could be provided for them, and Bembo returned to Rome, groaning in spirit over his hard fate. The high hopes which he had entertained on Leo's accession had been disappointed, the Cardinal's hat, which at one time dangled before his eyes, had vanished into space, and he found himself involved in vexatious lawsuits with rivals who disputed his

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, i. 46.

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right to the benefices which he already held. He was thoroughly sick of Rome, and hated the sight of a pen. At length, in June 1521, he obtained leave of absence on the score of ill health, and left the Eternal City, with the fixed resolve never to return there.

“God knows,” he wrote from the Villa to his old Urbino friend, Archbishop Fregoso, “that I left Rome and Pope Leo, on pretence of taking a short holiday for the good of my health, but with the firm resolution never to return and to spend what little is left me of life, for my own enjoyment, not for that of others. I am settled in Padua, a beautiful city with a temperate climate, quiet and convenient and singularly well adapted for the pursuit of letters. I spend part of my time in town, and part in this Villa, free from all cares, or, if my slender resources entail some burdens that I cannot lay down, these are comparatively light and do not hinder my studies. I would have taken this step long ago if it had been possible, and should not have wasted ten of the best years of my life which have been thrown away, excepting so far as they have procured me a little fortune and freedom.”<sup>1</sup>

During the next ten years most of Bembo's life was spent at his beloved Villa. In 1527 he succeeded in buying a fine *palazzo* in the parish of S. Bartolommeo in Padua, close to the great church of the

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, i. 118.

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Santo, where he housed his priceless treasures of art, the paintings by Raphael and Bellini, by Mantegna and Memling, the bronzes and marbles, the gems and rare manuscripts, which he had collected. But although he adorned this town house with a lovely garden and terraces of orange and lemon trees, and planted a grove where his favourite nightingales made their nests, he always escaped to the Villa in the early spring and lingered there until, on All Saints' Day, the University term opened with High Mass in the Cathedral.

His life there was brightened by the companionship of Morosina, the beautiful young girl who had lived with him in Rome, and who, until her death in 1535, was the cherished partner of his home and the mother of his children, although he never made her his wife. Bembo, as he sometimes found it necessary to remind his correspondents, was not a priest. Like many of his contemporaries, he had only taken minor orders to enable him to hold ecclesiastical benefices, and in this age of lax morals the irregularity of the connection gave no cause for scandal. The guests who came and went at the Villa, the friends who shared Bembo's intimacy, treated her exactly as if she had been his legal wife. Rodolfo Pio of Carpi, the young Protonotary De Rossi, Trifone Gabriele, and Molza talked and

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laughed with her and sent her friendly messages in their letters. Even ecclesiastics as saintly as Sadoletto and Contarini were not deterred by her presence from visiting the Villa, while the members of Bembo's own family, Gian Matteo and Marcella, showed her the liveliest affection.

Two years after they settled at Padua, Morosina gave birth to a boy, Lucilio, who became the apple of his father's eye. In May 1525 a second boy named Torquato was born, and three years later a girl, who received the classical name of Elena. The happiness of his domestic circle satisfied the cravings of Bembo's sensitive nature and filled a void in his life. Another inmate of the Villa was Colà Bruno—the *fidus Achates* who followed Bembo from Messina and never left him until his death in 1542. Messer Colà was indispensable to Bembo, alike as secretary and literary adviser, as steward and man of business. He wrote his letters, revised his verses, sold his crops and wine, superintended the publication of his works at Venice, and travelled all over Italy to collect his rents and defend his rights. Morosina and her children, Marcella and her husband, were equally devoted to Colà, and by the will which Bembo made in 1536 he appointed this loyal servant to be the guardian of his children, with the strict injunction never to leave their side, or allow anyone

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else to interfere with them. Perhaps a still greater mark of confidence was the fact that he left Colà all his writings in prose or verse to be published or not, at his discretion.

Nor was Bembo unmindful of the peasants who lived on his small estate—his little family, as he calls them in his letters. He took a fatherly interest in their concerns, protected them from the injustice of rapacious officials, nursed them when they were sick, and wept for them when they died. Many were the appeals which he addressed to the Podestà of Cittadella on behalf of these innocent *contadini*, whose wrongs he regarded as injuries to himself. One day he insisted on the release of a poor lad who had been arrested for bearing a sword, as if, in those troubled times, a weapon were not needed for self-defence. Another time he demanded the restoration of an old servant's effects, which a kinsman in Ferrara had detained unjustly. "I beg you," he wrote to Duke Alfonso's secretary, "send for the scoundrel and give him a good scolding, which he richly deserves. And if you can recover these things, which are worth little in themselves, but are precious to our poor old Anna, I shall be as much obliged as if they were Countess Matilda's dowry."<sup>1</sup> When, on the Feast of the Virgin, a dance was given at the Villa, Bembo would write to

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, iii. 115.

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his nephew Gian Matteo in Venice, begging him to send a few trifles such as women like, as prizes on this occasion—a mirror and a pair of combs, worth about two and a half *lire* each, and a coloured waistband, together with six *lire* of pretty pink and white sugared confetti. The death of his old gardener, Piero Antonio, was a real sorrow. “This year,” he wrote to his friend Flavio Crisolino, the Papal Secretary, “I have lost my Piero Antonio, and although he was only a servant, his death has grieved me more than you would have thought possible. But he was good and faithful, and had been constant in all the changes of fortune which have befallen me during the last twenty-five years. I cannot and will not forget him.”<sup>1</sup>

From his quiet retreat, Bembo kept up an active correspondence with his old friends and colleagues, and watched the critical events that were taking place in Rome. He received the news of the sudden death of his patron, Leo X, without any pretence at excessive sorrow, and lamented the accession of Pope Adrian IV, whose Papacy was, in his eyes, more hurtful than any vacancy. “Cursed,” he cried, “a thousand times cursed, be the blind goddess Fortune, for her deplorable lack of judgment!” And in common with all the friends of Art and Letters, he rejoiced at

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, iii. 120.



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the accession of a Medici Pope in the person of Clement VII. Bembo lost no time in going to kiss the new Pope's feet, and in November 1524 he arrived in Rome, bringing with him the MS. of his *Prose* as an offering. Clement received him graciously and promised him a Canonry of Padua, but not even the company of Sadoletto and Ghiberti could make him forget the Villa. "I am longing for home," he wrote to Rodolfo Pio, "and as soon as this Jubilee is over, I shall return far more willingly than I came here." Again in a letter to Trifone he says, "I count the days till I get back to you and my other friends, to our sweet and tranquil life, and my delicious Villetta." A sharp attack of fever, however, delayed his return, and it was not till April that he finally left Rome. From Pesaro he wrote to the Duchess of Urbino, expressing his disappointment at missing her, and telling her that his visit to Rome had nearly cost him his life. "Now, however," he adds, "I am well again, and on the way to my blessed Villetta, from which Rome shall never tear me again." <sup>1</sup>

A few days after his return he addressed the following letter to his old colleague, Agostino Foglietta, giving a graphic account of life at the Villa, and of the contrast which its peaceful delights offered to the turmoil of Rome :

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<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, ii. 32, iii. 88, iv. 41.

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“As you saw, I mounted my horse, still suffering from the illness which Rome unkindly gave me, in reward for my trouble in coming to see her. But, as I rode, my strength returned at every step, and by the time I arrived here, I was myself again. Whether this was due to the pleasure I felt in leaving Rome, which certainly treated me badly this time, or to the change of air, or to healthy exercise, I will not attempt to decide, probably it was the result of all three! At Padua I paid visits to some of my friends, and received visits from others, and then came on to my Villetta, which received me with open arms and where I find a peace and content that are a great contrast to the troubles which beset me in Rome. I do not hear disagreeable news. I need not think of lawsuits or wait on Procurators, or visit Auditors of the Rota. I hear nothing but the voices of nightingales warbling from every bush in joyous rivalry, and the songs of other birds, who all do their best to please me with their divine harmonies. I read, I write; when I choose, I ride or walk, I spend much of my time in a grove at the end of a pleasant and fruitful garden, where I gather vegetables for the first course of our evening meal, and sometimes pick a basket of strawberries, which are not only delicious to the taste, but perfume the whole breakfast-table with their fragrance. Nor should I forget to tell you that all day the garden and house, and the whole place, are full of roses. And that nothing should be lacking to my enjoyment, I spend the evening, when it is pleasanter to be on the water than on land, in a small boat. First I row along a clear stream that flows past the house and then on the Brenta, which this brook

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joins, and which here is a swift and joyous river, and waters our meadows on the other side. In this fashion I mean to spend the whole summer and autumn, only going to Padua now and then for a few days to see my friends, and make my Villa seem the more charming compared with the city.”<sup>1</sup>

So the days slipped away, and by August, Bembo felt himself once more “a simple peasant of the soil.” With his own hands he not only picked strawberries and roses, but dug the ground and planted trees and shrubs. Papal Secretaries who paid him a visit were pressed into the service, and became as keenly interested in the garden as its owner.

“To-morrow,” wrote Bembo one October to Flavio Crisolino, “I shall return home, to plant new trees in the little grove which has lost several oaks and chestnuts, owing to the intense heat of the past summer. Your ivy has already covered a fine large pavilion at the other end of the garden, and I have made another little pergola with ivy and larch-poles firmly fixed in the ground at regular intervals, which in two or three years’ time ought to be very beautiful. So you see that your work has produced excellent results. I rejoice to hear that you often think of my Villetta and of the happy life we lead there, although I can hardly believe that your important affairs leave you time to think of my small fortunes. But I do not repent my choice, and am more content every day and, thank God, both well and merry.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, iii. 73.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 120.

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The great reputation which Bembo had acquired as a poet and scholar, his vast knowledge of classical literature and the mastery with which he wrote both in Latin and in the *lingua volgare*, attracted all the men of letters who came to study at Padua. One summer day the venerable Professor Leonico rode out to the Villa with a distinguished company, which included young Ermes Stampa, the Duke of Milan's intimate friend, and Reginald Pole—"Monsignore d'Inghilterra" as he was called—who, besides being near of kin to the King of England, was said to be the most virtuous and learned youth at the University. These illustrious guests spent an enjoyable afternoon studying Bembo's priceless Codices and discussing the latest poems of Petrarch which he had discovered, and lingered on the pleasant lawn among the roses and honeysuckle, until the last glow of the setting sun had died away. This was a red-letter day in Bembo's calendar.

There were others, too, which lived long in his memory. One morning, news reached the Villa that Gaspare Contarini was coming to Padua on his way to Rome; so Bembo hastened to send horses for the Ambassador's use, and placed both his houses at the disposal of this august visitor. Another day his dear friend Trifone would come over from Ronchi with Vettore Soranzo, the young Papal Chamberlain, bringing their latest sonnets and canzoni for Messer Pietro's

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approval. Or else Luigi da Porto, the gallant young soldier who wrote the story of Romeo and Juliet, and who could handle the sword as skilfully as the pen, would ride over with his brother Bernardino from their Villa in the Berici hills, to read Bembo his latest romances. Sometimes Bembo and Colà would take horses and ride through the fair Trevigiana to visit M. Luigi Priuli in his fine house at Treville, or seek out Messer Alvise Cornaro in his Villa at Este in the green Euganean hills, and see the splendid gardens which Giangiorgio Trissino was laying out round his new country-house at Cricoli. All these places were within easy reach of Villa Bozza, and presents of choice fruit and early vegetables often passed between their different owners. Messer Luigi da Porto would send Bembo a basket of superb strawberries, or a brace of quails and a young kid. Another time a swift retriever for his use out hunting, or a bundle of fine asparagus, would arrive from Vicenza. "Com-mend me to our dear Marc Antonio Silvestri and his fine garden," wrote Bembo to the poet Cappello, "and beg him to send me some roots of his excellent artichokes."

Bembo's love of good things was well known to his friends, and all manner of delicacies found their way to the Villa. Costanza Fregoso, the wife of Count Landi of Piacenza, whose son came to study at Padua

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and lodged in Bembo's house, sent her old friend cheeses and salted tongues, or cases of lemons from the shores of the Lago di Garda; while boxes of sweetmeats, preserved citrons, and pink sugar confetti came from the General of the Augustinians at Venice. Bembo's own gifts of strawberries or flowers to his friends at Padua were generally accompanied with a sonnet or a canzone—"a few rhymes which saw the light this summer in the idleness of this *dolce Noniano*, and were born so lately that the ink on the page is hardly yet dry." "You are too courteous, my dear Ramusio," he exclaimed, when a richly bound copy of the donor's *Gallia* arrived, together with a fine young tree and a jar of olives from the Venetian historian.

From all parts of Italy, scholars and poets sent their masterpieces to receive the benefit of Bembo's advice and criticism. Sannazzaro sent his *De Partu Virginis* from Naples, Castiglione wrote from Toledo to beg that Bembo would revise the proof of his *Cortegiano*, Ariosto brought the new edition of his *Orlando* to lay before him. Trifone and Nava-gero, Molza and Tebaldeo, Bernardo Tasso of Ferrara, and the Veronese poet Fracastoro, Vittoria Colonna and Veronica Gambara, all consulted "this oracle of Apollo" regarding their productions, while countless other poets whose names are forgotten followed their

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example and sought the advice of this one man whose authority was supreme in literary matters.

Meanwhile Bembo's own studies were not neglected. "Here I am," he wrote to a Roman prelate, a few weeks after his return to the Villa in 1525, "busy once more with my old friends, the books, whose good graces, I flatter myself, I have recovered. They had good reason to be vexed with me, as I had not looked at them during the whole winter, although, God knows, this was not my fault." A few years later he wrote to his old secretary Avila, "I read and write more now than I have ever done before."<sup>1</sup> Much of his leisure was devoted to the annotation of his old favourites, Petrarch and Dante, and to the collation of classical texts, but he found time to study Provençal poetry and Spanish literature, and even wrote verses in Spanish to please Duchess Lucrezia. During these years he revised most of his earlier works for publication. *Gli Asolani*, the Latin dialogues *Etna*, *De ducibus*, and the *Prose* were all printed at the Aldine Press in 1530, as well as the volume of *Rime*, of which no fewer than thirty editions were published before the close of the century.

So happy and content amid these varied occupations was the great scholar, that he never stirred from home, and did not even go to Venice for two years. But in

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, ii. vi. 15, ii. 200.

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May 1527 the peace of the Villa was rudely disturbed by the news of the terrible disaster which had befallen Rome—the capture and sack of the city by the Imperialist armies. Like all who had known the Eternal City in the golden days of Leo, Bembo was filled with consternation. In his letters to Sadoleto at Carpentras, he poured out the anguish of his soul, and mourned over the ruin which had overtaken his dearest friends. Foglietta was killed by a chance shot, Ghiberti, the Papal Datary, was dragged from prison to prison by Spanish soldiers, Angelo Colocci's price-*less* collections were plundered before his eyes, Negri lost his library and Paolo Giovio the manuscript of his history. Tebaldeo, the beloved friend of Bembo and Raphael, was given up for lost, and was only saved by taking refuge in Palazzo Colonna. In his joy at hearing of his friend's safety, Bembo sent Tebaldeo a present of thirty ducats to relieve his most pressing needs, and begged him to come to Padua or Venice, assuring him of the most friendly reception from his many admirers. "Come here to those who love you and await you," he wrote, "and leave this miserable corpse of our once beautiful Rome."<sup>1</sup>

But by this time all Italy was overrun by foreign invaders. A squadron of German and Spanish troops ravaged Bembo's *Commenda* at Bologna, cutting down

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, iii. 157.



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fruit trees and vines for fuel, and burning the houses of the unhappy peasants. Even the Villa was not safe from alarms. In his terror at the approach of these savage hordes, Bembo prepared to remove his family to Venice in the spring of 1528, and begged Ramusio for the use of his father-in-law Navagero's house, the Ambassador being in France at the time. "Would to God," he exclaimed, "that these vile Germans had stayed by their own stoves, instead of coming here to vex us." Fortunately the Landsknechten took another road, and this cloud which darkened the horizon drifted away to the north. "I hear," he wrote to Soranzo, "that these cursed Germans are marching on Peschiera, and we shall be rid of them by to-morrow. So Messer Trifone may stay quietly at Ronchi, and I need not load my barge for Venice." Then he adds the following characteristic message: "Tell my Aunt, Madonna Cecilia, that for the last four days, a most delicious nightingale has been singing in my garden, filling my soul with rapture all day long, and the closer I stand and watch him, the better he sings. I know that if she were here, she would envy me, and I hope she will come to my house the more willingly, to hear this enchanting little bird."<sup>1</sup>

The following year was saddened by the death of several of Bembo's most intimate friends. Castiglione,

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, ii. 183.

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his old comrade at the Court of Urbino, died in Spain, broken-hearted by the sack of Rome; and he lost both his neighbour Luigi da Porto, and the beloved Navagero, who died of fever at Blois. "He was too excellent a man for these cruel and miserable times," wrote Bembo. "Cursed, oh! thrice cursed be the evil fate which has robbed me of the men I loved best. But my pen refuses to do her part, and I had rather weep than write."

He remained at the Villa all through the spring and summer, and found his best comfort in the sweet scents of the garden and the countless nightingales which soothed his wounded spirits with their delicious song.

"Yet are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake,  
For Death, he taketh all away, but these he cannot take."

At Christmas Bembo went to Bologna to meet the Pope, and to see the Emperor, who came, it was fondly hoped, to restore peace to Italy and receive the Imperial Crown. Many of his old friends were there to welcome him—Isabella d'Este, her brother Alfonso, the Duke and Duchess of Urbino; and every day a brilliant company of scholars and poets met at the house of Veronica Gambara. But not all these splendours could keep Bembo away from his Villa in the springtime, and by March he was at home again with Morosina and her children.

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"I am back at my Villa," he wrote to Soranzo, "and have already spent three days here with singular pleasure, owing to the extraordinary beauty of the season. No one ever remembers so fine a March! Not only are the roads dry, the skies blue and the air as balmy as in summer—all three things that are very unusual at this time of year—but the trees are green and full of leaf, and their foliage already affords us shade from the heat of the sun, which has not yet climbed far towards the north. Yesterday, which was the Feast of Our Lady, I picked some quite large almonds and several ripe strawberries, which is more singular as none have yet arrived in the city from Arquà, where, as you know, fruit ripens earlier than in any of these parts. What is still more remarkable, the vines in this district have put forth not only eyes, but young tendrils, before the pruning-knife has touched them. The swallows have been here some days, and the turtle, cuckoo, and nightingale have all been heard. If, as I hear, the Papal Court is on the way to Rome, you will have summer weather at Easter, which I for one do not envy you."<sup>1</sup>

The wonderful beauty of the season, as Bembo told the Pope in another letter, made him less inclined to envy the gentle citizens of Padua, whom he saw returning from the Coronation festivities with faces flushed and tired by their exertions to secure a good place at the pageant. But these halcyon days at the Villa were already numbered. On the death of Navagero,

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, ii. 200.

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Ramusio informed Bembo that he had been proposed as his successor in the important office of historiographer to the Republic. At first he shrank from undertaking so arduous a task, and pleaded his advancing years and ignorance of history in support of his reluctance. But his objections were overruled, and in June 1530 he was appointed to succeed Messer Andrea, both as historian to the State and Keeper of the Nicene Library, for which latter office his vast knowledge of manuscripts fitted him especially. "God forgive you, my son, Gian Matteo, and my brother, Messer Giovanni Battista, for interrupting the sweet repose of this delicious life and the studies that are dearer to me than any dignities and grandeur. It is your doing I am persuaded, and I know that your motive has been an excellent one. But once I put out to sea again and take up this burden, I shall never live as peacefully as of old. . . . And believe me, it is no light task to write history—with any credit to oneself."<sup>1</sup>

During the next eight years Bembo discharged the duties of his double office with conscientious assiduity. His house in Venice became the meeting-place of the most famous scholars, and his writings attained a world-wide celebrity. Erasmus celebrated his praises as the brightest ornament of the age, and in his dreams Aretino saw him throned on the heights of Parnassus

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, ii. 214.

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and crowned by celestial spirits with a diadem of light. But henceforth his visits to the Villa were few and far between. Morosina and her children still spent the summer there, and Bembo joined them whenever he could snatch a few days from his official duties. "To-day I am at the Villa, and seem to be alive again," he wrote one August to Gian Matteo at Venice. "Here it is fresh and beautiful, and altogether delightful. I mean to stay here for a few days, and wish that you could leave your desk and come here with your boy Luigi."

But all too soon, sorrows came to darken this happy home. Bembo's promising boy, Lucilio, died there one summer day in 1532, after a few hours' illness. "I have lost my Lucilio," the stricken father wrote to his old friend Avila, "my sweet and charming boy, on whom, as you know, all the hopes of my house were set. I cannot tell you what grief this unexpected event has caused me. . . . So in one moment all our hopes and dreams are shattered." And in answer to Veronica Gambara's letter of sympathy he wrote: "Certainly I have lost a little son, who more than fulfilled every hope I had formed of his future although he was not yet nine years of age. But I try not to murmur at the Will of God, and since my flower was doomed to die so soon, at least I thank Heaven that he was all I could most desire."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, iii. 212, iv. 27.

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Morosina never recovered from the shock of her child's death. Three years later she followed him to the grave, and was buried under a stately tomb in the church of S. Bartolommeo. Bembo was inconsolable for her loss.

"What shall I say, my dearest Trifone," he wrote to his old and valued friend, "in answer to your letter on the death of my loved Morosina? Before it reached me, I had turned for comfort to the Ancients, and tried to read the consoling words which they used at such moments. But this does me little good, for no sooner do I lay down the book, than I remember she is gone, and that I have lost the sweetest soul that ever lived. She loved me far more than herself and was altogether satisfied with my love, despising the gifts and ornaments of jewels and fine clothes which please other women. And this blessed soul was clad in the fairest form, and had the loveliest face that has ever been seen in these lands, or, perhaps, in the present time. It is true, as you say, that I ought to thank God who gave her to me for all these years. I try to do this, but it is impossible in one moment to lay aside the affections which are part of our being, and must remain with us as long as we live. I know how true your sorrow is, and realise how much you loved this fair and noble woman, and how deeply she on her part loved and honoured you. Farewell."<sup>1</sup>

How deeply Bembo felt this bereavement we learn from the touching letter which he wrote to Ramusio,

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, ii. 37.

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when he in his turn lost his wife a few months later. "On returning last night from Praglia, where I had ridden for exercise and change of scene, I found the sad news of the death of your dear wife, Madonna Franceschina, awaiting me. I feel for you as a fond brother, who knows by experience how hard these partings are to bear. For when we are already old and want these sweet and faithful companions more than ever, it is a bitter and cruel thing to be deprived of them."<sup>1</sup>

The two children whom Morosina had left him were henceforth the object of Bembo's tenderest care—the boy Torquato and the little Elena, who grew up so like her mother that the sight of her lovely face often brought tears to his eyes. They still spent the summer at the Villa, in Colà's charge, and when, in 1539, Bembo received the long-coveted Cardinal's hat from Paul III, he came there to spend his last few days with them. The sight of these familiar places recalled the past vividly; he wrote his beautiful elegy on the death of Morosina and sent it to his intimate friend Elisabetta Quirini at Venice, begging her to let no one see the verses, or hear that they had been composed after his election. Then the new Cardinal went on to Rome, and in spite of the load of seventy years that weighed heavily on his shoulders, took up

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, ii. 103.

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these new duties with his wonted ardour. "I am well," he wrote on Christmas Eve to Venice. "This air is milder than ours and suits me better. I am about to be ordained, and shall learn to say Mass to-morrow. You see how great a change God has wrought in me."<sup>1</sup>

But amid all the glamour of Rome and the manifold interests of this new life, Bembo never forgot Villa Bozza. Nothing gave him more pleasure than to hear from the newly arrived Venetian Ambassador the latest tidings of Torquato and Elena, and above all of the garden. He insisted on hearing every detail of the children's life, and charged Colà to provide the best tutors for them both, saying that money spent on education was always well spent. Unfortunately, Torquato was an incorrigible idler, who hated the sight of a book, while Elena displayed an independent spirit that tried the patience of the nuns in whose convent she had been placed. "I regret to hear," wrote her father, "that you have become proud and obstinate, and refuse to obey your teachers. This has vexed me greatly, because girls of this kind grow up so disagreeable that everyone dislikes them, most of all their husbands and parents." Worse than all, Elena begged to be allowed to learn to play the clavichord, a request which the Cardinal sternly refused, saying that this was a vain and fri-

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, v. 225.



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volous pursuit, unworthy of a modest and honourable lady. "Besides which," he adds, "you will never play well, unless you devote ten or twelve years to this exercise, which you know would be impossible. And if you play badly, your music will bring you little pleasure and much disgrace. So give up this foolish desire, and tell your companions that you are not going to learn the clavichord for them to laugh at you."<sup>1</sup>

On his seventy-first birthday—May 20, 1541—Bembo wrote to Colà, thanking him for all his loving care of the children, and rejoicing to hear that Elena was writing Latin verses and learning grammar, and that Torquato showed some taste for antiques, the sure sign of a gentle nature. "This month he enters his seventeenth year, and is no longer a child, but a man. Elena, too, will be thirteen on the last day of June. Tell me if she is growing up as tall and beautiful as she promised to be. For certainly there is nothing dearer in the world to me, or that I love half as well as I do this child." That summer was spent by Torquato and Elena with Colà at the Villa, where they were as merry as crickets. "I am glad," wrote the Cardinal, "to hear that you are staying longer than usual at my Villetta, especially for Elena's sake, for this is one of the two seasons of the year when

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, iv. 105, 107.

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it is looking its best. I envy you not a little. But keep well and enjoy yourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

It was the last summer which this joyous party were to spend at Villa Bozza. For Colà—good, faithful Colà—fell suddenly ill that winter and died. Elena begged in vain to be allowed to go to the Villa as usual with her brother in August, but was told that at her age this was impossible, and that she must stay in the convent until the time came for her to leave it for good.

The Cardinal was already looking out for a suitable match for his daughter, and in the summer of 1543 he obtained the Pope's leave to go to Venice, that he might arrange a marriage “for the child whom my human frailty gave me.” In July, Elena was married at Padua, in her father's presence, to Pietro Gradenigo, a young Venetian “of good family and excellent appearance.” The Cardinal paid a last visit to the Villa, which he had not seen for many years, and returned to his new diocese at Gubbio, not without a sigh for the old days when he was a free man and could live where he chose. After the birth of Elena's son in 1544, she and her husband went to Villa Bozza for the autumn, leaving the little Paolino, by her father's orders, with her cousins. Bembo took the keenest interest in his grandson, and gave Elena minute

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, iii. 374-6.

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directions as to his clothes and food, begging her above all to see that the boy was not allowed to walk too early. Unfortunately the marriage had not proved altogether happy. The Cardinal was sorely disturbed to hear of his son-in-law's indiscretions, and could only recommend the young wife to be patient and gentle herself, while he begged Marcella to be kind to *la poverina*. At his request, however, Elisabetta Quirini spoke seriously to Pietro on the subject, and did this with so much tact that the young man actually listened to her advice. After the birth of a second child, in August 1546, the young couple again spent the autumn at the Villa, to Elena's delight and her father's great satisfaction.

"I am thankful," he wrote to Gian Matteo in October, "to hear what you say of my son-in-law, and especially to know that he and his wife are happy together. You may imagine how much I envy them for being at the Villa for the vintage, but as long as they are enjoying themselves, I shall be quite content." And to Pietro he wrote: "I can see you and Elena to-day at the Villa, enjoying this sweet and delicious time of year, and must own that I feel very envious."<sup>1</sup> The thought of his darling child spending these sunny autumn days under the grape-laden vines, on the banks of the swift-flowing Brenta, revived old

<sup>1</sup> *Lettere*, iv. 105, 107.

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memories, and made him long to see the place again. He wrote to Elena, telling her how much he hoped to come to Padua another year, and spend the summer with them at his beloved Villetta. But a few days after this he had a fall, from the effects of which he never recovered. Three months later—on January 30, 1547—the great Cardinal died in Rome, and never saw Elena or the Villa again.





*Photo: Anderson, Rome*

BIANCA SFORZA  
(Ambrogio de Predis)

## BIANCA SFORZA—THE LADY OF THE AMBROSIANA

“Quant 'è bella giovinezza  
Che si fugge tuttavia !  
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia,  
Di doman non c'è certezza.”

LORENZO DE' MEDICI.

THERE are some portraits which have a strange and peculiar fascination. Most of us recall unforgettable faces by Giorgione and Titian, by Rembrandt and Holbein, as well as the one supreme picture which has laid its spell on all generations—Leonardo's “Mona Lisa.” Something of the same mysterious charm belongs to the unknown “Lady of the Ambrosiana,” in Milan, a portrait which certainly came from Leonardo's studio, if it was not actually painted by his hand. For centuries this lovely profile hung in a dark corner of Cardinal Federico Borromeo's Gallery, dirty and neglected. But even in those ignorant days its surpassing beauty attracted the notice of connoisseurs. Fifty years ago Otto Mündler praised its divine excellence, and Gaillard, the accomplished French engraver, revealed its charm to readers of the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* in a plate executed only two years before his premature death. Dr. Bode has told us of the young

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Italian student, Gustavo Frizzoni, who paid a visit to Berlin and on his return home sent him a photograph of the Ambrosiana portrait, as the rarest thing in Milan. To-day the precious picture has been cleaned, re-framed, and hung in a prominent place, while the admirable reproduction published by the Medici Society has made this portrait one of the most popular of Renaissance works. We are all of us familiar with the exquisite little head and sweet young face, so pure and virginal in its innocent charm, with the long slender throat and the bright auburn locks caught up in their jewelled fillet. The costly attire and rich gems bear witness to the maiden's high degree, and the intricate pattern of linked ornament, first worn by Duchess Beatrice, and repeated in different forms by Leonardo, point to a close connection with the house of Sforza. Yet the origin of the portrait is still wrapt in mystery.

In the good old days, when every second picture was ascribed to a great master, this portrait and its companion-piece—the bust of a young man in red cap and fur-trimmed vest—were labelled as portraits of Lodovico Sforza and his wife Beatrice, painted by Leonardo da Vinci. Morelli was the first to question this attribution, and to point out certain defects in the drawing of the girl's head and neck, and other peculiarities, which made it probable that the portraits were the work of Ambrogio de Predis, a young Milanese



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artist who stood high in the Moro's favour, and was employed to paint portraits of the ducal family between 1482 and 1500. Ambrogio was one of Leonardo's most capable assistants, and when the Franciscan friars refused to give the Florentine master a sufficient sum for his "*Vierge aux Rochers*," he was employed to execute a replica of the altar-piece for their church. Leonardo's painting, as we all know, was bought by Francis I, and now hangs in the Louvre, while his pupil's copy remained in S. Francesco of Milan, until in 1796 it was bought for thirty ducats by Gavin Hamilton and eventually passed from Lord Suffolk's collection into the National Gallery. Since Morelli recognised the same hand in the Ambrosiana portraits, the war of attributions has waged fiercely round these pictures. While the ascription to Ambrogio de Predis has been accepted by Dr. Frizzoni, Mr. Berenson, and other leading critics, it is hotly contested by Dr. Bode and the Milanese historian, Signor Beltrami, who still maintain the "*Lady of the Ambrosiana*" to be Leonardo's work.

The absurdity of identifying these pictures as the portraits of Lodovico Sforza and Beatrice d'Este has, however, been generally acknowledged. We have only to compare them with well-known portraits, busts, and medals of the Duke and Duchess to recognise the fallacy of the old legend. The strongly marked features of Lodovico, which are familiar to us

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in the Trivulzio portrait and countless reliefs and medals, bear no similarity to those of the beardless youth in Ambrogio's painting, while Cristoforo Romano's bust of the young Duchess in the Louvre and Costa's portrait of her in the Pitti have little affinity with the lady's type of countenance. Beatrice's charm, according to her contemporaries, was rather due to her colouring and vivacity, to her sparkling black eyes and animated expression, than to any regular beauty of feature, while her plump throat and chin, and natural inclination to corpulence, formed a marked contrast to the slenderness and delicacy of the Ambrosiana maiden.

Another suggestion, first made by Dr. Bode, was that the personages here represented were Lodovico's nephew, Gian Galeazzo Sforza, Duke of Milan, and his wife Isabella of Aragon. But here again the theory is disproved by authentic portraits and medals, and Duchess Isabella's proud features and majestic bearing have certainly little in common with the shy, gentle face of the girl in our picture. More plausible at first sight is the supposition that we have here a portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza, the sister of Gian Galeazzo and the wife of the Emperor Maximilian. This idea owes its origin to the mention made in his diary by the so-called "Anonimo," Marco Antonio Michieli, of a portrait which he saw in the home of Taddeo Contarini, at Venice, in 1525, and

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described as "a profile portrait of Madonna . . . daughter of Signor Lodovico of Milan . . . afterwards married to the Emperor Maximilian, by the hand of . . . Milanese." Taddeo Contarini was a wealthy Venetian banker, who often supplied Isabella d'Este and her lord with loans of money, and who owned several fine paintings by Giorgione and other choice works of art. Nothing would be more likely than that, after the sack of the Castello of Milan by the French in 1499, and the dispersion of the Moro's treasures, this picture fell into the hands of some Venetian dealer, who sold it to Contarini. But there was some evident confusion in the Anonimo's mind as to the two Bianca Sforzas. It was not Lodovico's daughter, but his niece, the sister of the reigning Duke, who in 1498 became the wife of Maximilian I. Two superb portraits of the young Empress are still in existence. Both were painted by Ambrogio de' Predis, who at the Emperor's request was sent to Innsbrück in his bride's suite, and who took refuge there in 1502, after the conquest of Milan by the French. One of Bianca's portraits is now in the Widener Gallery, at Philadelphia, U.S.A., the other remains in the possession of the Countess Visconti-Arconati, in Paris. In the one she wears a sumptuous court robe and a profusion of jewels, in the other she is clad in a simple tight-fitting bodice, cut square at the neck, with a single string of pearls

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round her throat. But neither of these bear any likeness to the portrait of the Ambrosiana. In both we notice the same receding chin and slightly aquiline nose, the same placid and self-satisfied expression. The Empress Bianca was, as she is here represented, a thoroughly dull commonplace woman, who annoyed her imperial lord as much by her childish and undignified behaviour as by her lavish expenditure on clothes and trinkets. Bianca, as Maximilian justly remarked, was quite as fair a woman as his first wife, Mary of Burgundy, but was very inferior to her in good sense and character. Yet she had a kind heart, and in after years extended generous help and protection not only to the members of her own family, but to all the Milanese exiles who sought shelter at the imperial court after the Moro's fall. In her dull surroundings at Innsbrück, the young Empress pined for the blue skies and brilliant life of her old home, and was always writing to her uncle Lodovico and to Duchess Beatrice, begging them to send her gloves and perfumes, feathers and silks for her own use, and to give her news of the kindred and friends for whom she sighed. As Dr. Bode has justly remarked, the Lady of the Ambrosiana must have been an infinitely more intelligent and attractive person than the poor foolish Empress, who, like her mother Bona, was evidently "*une dame de petit sens.*"

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But there was another Bianca Sforza, who, as Michieli writes, was "the daughter of Signor Lodovico of Milan." A German scholar, Dr. Paul Müller-Walde, first suggested that this Bianca, whom the Anonimo had evidently confused with her cousin, was in all probability the original of Ambrogio de Predis' portrait.<sup>1</sup> A "ritratto di Madonna Bianca," we learn from Leonardo's note-books, was among the commissions given him in the year 1491, by his patron Lodovico Sforza. But we never hear that he executed the order, and like many others it was probably left to his pupil Ambrogio, who painted the portrait which we now see in the Ambrosiana.

All that we know of Bianco Sforza agrees with the picture. She was very delicate and very lovely, full of charm, sweetness, and intelligence. The only daughter of the great Moro, she was married, at the age of fourteen, to her father's prime favourite, Galeazzo di San Severino, and died a few months afterwards, to the infinite grief of the whole Milanese court. Such, briefly told, is the story of this fascinating maiden, whose gentle face haunts us with a dim foreboding of early death.

"Et rose, elle a vecu ce que vivent les roses,  
L'espace d'un matin."

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Müller-Walde im Jahrbuch d. K. Preuss. Sammlungen, xviii. 110.

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Recent researches enable us to add a few more details to the short sad tale. Bianca Giovanna Sforza was born at Milan in 1482, shortly after Lodovico's return from exile and appointment as Regent, during his nephew Gian Galeazzo's minority. Her mother, Bernardina de' Corradis, was one of the many mistresses for whom the Moro seems to have had a passing fancy. After giving birth to Bianca, she married a Milanese gentleman and bore him several children.<sup>1</sup> But Lodovico, after his custom, treated his discarded mistress kindly, giving her a liberal allowance and letting her have frequent access to Bianca, who was brought up, under his own eye, in the Castello. "In this country," remarks Commynes, "no difference is made between legitimate and illegitimate children." The French chronicler's saying was literally true of the Este and Sforza princes. The good Duchess Leonora brought up her husband's illegitimate daughter, Lucrezia, with her own children, and both Isabella D'Este and Elizabetta Gonzaga treated the Marquis Francesco's natural daughter, Margherita, with the utmost affection. Lodovico Sforza had already two illegitimate sons, Galeazzo, who died in his childhood, and Leone, the son of a Roman girl, who was born in 1476. But little Bianca had the distinction of being his only daughter, and, from the first, was the object

<sup>1</sup> A. Giulini in *Archivio St. Lomb.*, xxxix. 243.

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of his especial affection. Before she was a year old, on the 29th of April, 1483, he made a will, settling 12,000 ducats on her, and six years later he took the further step of proclaiming her legitimacy, by virtue of a ducal decree issued at Vigevano on the 8th of November, 1489. By this time Lodovico's own marriage with Beatrice d'Este had been arranged, although its completion was delayed, owing to his new liaison with the beautiful and accomplished Cecilia Gallerani. He now promised Bianca's hand to his favourite, Galeazzo di San Severino, whom Dr. Müller-Walde assumes to be the original of the unfinished portrait by Ambrogio de Predis which forms the companion-piece to that of Bianca in the Ambrosiana. In the absence of authentic portraits or medals of the hero, it is impossible to say if this supposition is correct, but the handsome and sensitive face agrees with all we know of Bianca's husband. The musical notes in the background, that were brought to light by Signor Cavenaghi when he cleaned the portrait, are by no means incompatible with Dr. Müller-Walde's theory, since Lodovico's favourite was noted for his love of music and poetry. A son of Robert di San Severino, the valiant Condottiere who was by turn Lodovico's staunchest ally and his most deadly foe, and of his Siense wife, Lucrezia Malavolti, Galeazzo was related to the ducal house through

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his grandmother, Lisa Sforza, a sister of Francesco, who possessed a large share of the great Duke's courage and ability. After his father was killed fighting at the head of the Venetian forces in Tyrol, Galeazzo entered Lodovico's service and rose high in his favour. This brilliant and accomplished youth, who excelled in all knightly exercises, and took delight in art and letters, became dear to the Moro as a son, and was daily honoured with fresh marks of his confidence and affection. In 1489 he made Galeazzo Captain-general of the Milanese armies, and gave him the hand of his little daughter, who was growing up a singularly lovely and attractive child, "counting her the most precious thing he had on earth."

On the 10th of January, 1490, the wedding was solemnised with due splendour in the Castello of Milan, before the Duke and Duchess and the whole court. Bellincioni, the favourite poet of the Sforza princes, wrote an ode for the occasion, in which he celebrated the bridegroom's prowess in arms, his generous soul and noble heart, while he praised the charms of the youthful bride, "the phoenix of her age and the heir of her illustrious father's genius." Bianca's dowry included the city of Voghera and the magnificent palace in Milan, formerly given by Francesco Sforza to Cosimo de' Medici. The Medici Bank, as it was called, stood in the narrow Via de



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Bossi, near the Castello, and had been decorated by the foremost artists of the day. Michelozzi is said to have designed the noble portal adorned with marble reliefs of Duke Francesco and his wife, Bianca, now in the Castello Museum, and the Brescian painter, Vincenzo Foppa, was certainly employed to paint the interior. The Etruscan architect, Filarette, writing in 1464, devotes several pages of his *Trattato* to a description of its splendid loggias, marble halls, and richly carved and painted ceilings, and ends by declaring that it is the "most beautiful thing in Milan."<sup>1</sup> At that time Foppa was painting the palace-walls with frescoes from Roman history, including the favourite story of Trajan and the Widow, and portraits of the ducal family. But the work was interrupted by the death of Cosimo, and twenty years later his grandson, Lorenzo, was compelled by financial difficulties to sell the bank for 4000 ducats to Luigi da Tersago, Captain of the Milanese Horse. The new owner, being a wealthy man, spent large sums on the improvements of the house, adding a stately loggia and laying out vast gardens with terraces, fountains, and groves of palm and cypress. Foppa, who had lately returned to Milan, was summoned to resume his task, and painted a new series of frescoes along the parapet of

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Milan under the Sforza*, by C. M. Ady, 268.

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the inner courtyard. A fragment of one of these frescoes—the charming little painting popularly known as “Gian Galeazzo reading Cicero”—was rescued from destruction when the house was pulled down in 1864, and was sold by a French dealer to Sir Richard Wallace. It is now among the treasures of the Wallace Collection at Hertford House.

Unfortunately Luigi da Tersago became implicated in the conspiracy against the regent, Lodovico, that was set on foot by the Castellan, Filippo da Eustachio, in September 1489. The unhappy captain's guilt was proved, and he was condemned to end his days miserably in the dungeons of Pavia. His splendid house was confiscated with all the priceless tapestries, furniture, plate, and jewels which it contained. On hearing of Tersago's disgrace, Lorenzo de' Medici, who, in Guicciardini's graphic phrase, had parted from the Bank “with bitter tears in his eyes,” and had never ceased to regret its loss, begged Lodovico to let him buy it back for 4000 ducats, the original price which he had received for his house. But Lodovico refused to take less than double this sum, saying that Tersago's improvements had greatly increased the value of the palace, and told the Duke of Ferrara's ambassador privately that he intended it for his own daughter's use. Doubtless “Messer Galeaz,” whose fine taste in art was well known,

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already had his eye on the house, which from its size and splendour, as well as from its vicinity to the Castello, was a most desirable residence. At the same time, his favourite Leonardo the Florentine was employed to build the sumptuous stables for his horses, which excited the envy and admiration of all the Este and Gonzaga princes. "It seems to me," wrote Jacopo Trotti, the Ferrarese Envoy, whom Lodovico honoured with his confidence, "that Messer Galeaz is Duke of Milan. He can do whatever he likes, and is given whatever he chooses to ask, or wish for." From the day of his betrothal to Bianca Sforza, Galeazzo enjoyed all a son's privileges. He ate and drank at Lodovico's table, and became, what his father-in-law had promised to make him, the first man in the State.

Meanwhile his eight-year-old bride remained under her father's roof. A separate household was assigned to her, she bore the title of the Magnifico Galeazzo's wife, and on State occasions appeared in public, with the pomp due to her rank. When Beatrice d'Este entered Milan on the 22nd of January, as Lodovico's wife, and Isabella of Aragon rode out to receive her at S. Eustorgio, Bianca sat by her side in the State chariot, while Lodovico, mounted on a superb war-horse and clad in gorgeous cloth of gold, escorted his bride to the sound of trumpets and drums. She was

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present the next day at the Tournament on the Piazza del Castello, when her gallant lord, "Messer Galeaz," appeared at the head of a troop of Scythians, in costumes designed by Leonardo, and bore off the chief prize before his young wife's eyes.

Duchess Beatrice and her step-daughter were soon fast friends. "La più zentil donna in Italia," as this bride of sixteen was called, welcomed the companionship of the captivating child, who was not many years younger than herself, and the two were soon inseparable. At the same time Messer Galeaz became the young Duchess's most loyal and devoted squire. He rode out with her on hunting parties to the ducal villas in the Brianza, and sang and danced, or played at *palla* with her. As he wrote to Beatrice's sister, the Marchioness Isabella :

"I have torn my clothes and cut my boots to pieces, and played the fool into the bargain. These are the rewards one gains in the service of ladies! But I am content, as it is all for the sake of my Duchess, whom I never mean to fail in life or death."<sup>1</sup>

On St. Andrew's Day, 1493, the wedding of the Empress Bianca was celebrated with all the splendour that Lodovico could command. Leonardo's colossal horse was set upon a triumphal arch opposite the

<sup>1</sup> *Beatrice d'Este*, by Julia Cartwright, 82 ; A. Luzio, *Arch. st. Lomb.*, xvii. 109.

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Castello, and Galeazzo di Sanseverino appeared as captain of the ducal armies at the head of the nuptial procession, when the bride, with her fair locks flowing over her shoulders, returned to the palace through the decorated streets. On this auspicious day his young wife, clad in white satin and pearls, rode in the chariot of state, between the two duchesses, Isabella and Beatrice, and took her seat with them on the tribunal in front of the high altar, when the Archbishop placed the crown with the cross and orb of the world on the Empress's head.

Bianca was present again, in the following spring, when Beatrice received King Charles VIII at Asti, and was among the Milanese ladies, whose beauty and rich attire made so deep an impression on this monarch. A French courtier, writing to the King's sister, Anne de Beaujeu, describes the young duchess's robe of gold and green brocade, her crimson silk hat with its tall white plumes, and long coil of hair glittering with pearls, and dwells with admiration on the gallant way in which she rode, sitting up on her horse as erect as if she had been a man. "With her on horseback came a troop of twenty ladies, and among them the lovely young wife of the Magnifico Galeazzo," whose husband had lately been sent on a mission to the French Court, and was well known to Charles and his suite. The King—a little, ugly man, with large

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hands and feet and ungainly figure, but as Beatrice remarks, "far more friendly and agreeable in manner than I expected"—advanced cap in hand and proceeded to salute Beatrice and Bianca, and then all the ladies, in the French fashion, kissing them on the cheek. Charles, on his part, was so much charmed with the Duchess that he paid her a visit the next day, at the Castello of Annona, three miles from Asti, and spent three hours in her company. This time Beatrice and Bianca both wore green satin robes, slashed with white, and green velvet caps, with white aigrettes, and clasps of diamonds and rubies. The bodices of their gowns were studded with precious gems, and they wore priceless pearls on their bare arms and necks, a fashion which seems to have surprised the French courtiers. After conversing pleasantly for some time, Charles begged Beatrice and her daughter to dance before him, which they did, first in the Italian, and then—"to please the King—in the French style." "And I can assure you, Madame," adds the writer, "that they acquitted themselves exceedingly well, although they had never danced in this fashion before."<sup>1</sup>

As we read the records of the home life of the ducal family, which are preserved in the musty old

<sup>1</sup> Godefroi, *Hist. de Charles VIII*; Viacomte Delaborde, *L'Expédition de Charles VIII en Italie*.

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archives at Milan and Modena, we catch charming glimpses of Bianca. We read, for instance, how she and Beatrice went out together on bright spring mornings to pick flowers in the gardens of the Castello, and how they rode out to Vigevano or Cussago, to fly their herons and enjoy the balmy sweetness of the air, and danced and ran races and played at *palla* on the green sward. In a graphic letter to his master, Duke Ercole, Jacopo Trotti describes how on May-day the dukes and duchesses, followed by the whole Court, rode out from the Castello, according to their usual custom, to receive the first flowers of spring—*torre del Majo*. The stately procession issued from the gates in the early morning and rode out three miles into the country, where the dukes and their consorts flew falcons and then returned to the piazza in front of the Castello, to receive the first May-blossoms from the hands of a troop of maidens, before an immense concourse of people. On this occasion Isabella and Beatrice were clad in green taby silk and wore their hair after the French fashion, crowned by a peaked head-dress, studded with pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, with long silken veils flowing down to the ground. "But everyone noticed," remarks Trotti, "that the Duchess Beatrice's pearls were much finer and larger than those worn by the Duchess of Milan. And Madonna Bianca, the daughter of Signor Lodovico, was dressed in exactly

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the same manner, and they all three rode the most beautiful white horses, with trappings of green satin and gold, and their ladies, about forty in number, also wore green satin vests and jackets, and their hair was dressed *alla francese*, but without any jewels. And after the bouquets of May-blossom had been presented to them with great triumph and rejoicing, they rode home to dinner.<sup>1</sup>

But every day, as Isabella d'Este wrote to her friends at Mantua, new festivities succeeded each other, each one more splendid and triumphal than the last. Beatrice and her sister were never tired of riding and driving in the park of the Castello or through the streets of Milan, "which had been made so beautiful that one would hardly recognise the place. For this indeed," she tells Giovanni Gonzaga, "is the school of the master of those who know."

No doubt, as the Ferrarese Ambassador hints, there were bitter jealousies and dark secrets under all this joy and splendour. The rivalry of Isabella and Beatrice became every day more apparent, while Duke Gian Galeazzo's love of pleasure and incapacity for business made him a mere figure-head, and to his wife's regret left the reins of government entirely in his uncle's hands. Fortunately for Bianca, her sweet nature and affectionate

<sup>1</sup> *Archivio di Stato Modena. Carteggio degli Ambasciatori*, Busta 7. *La Corte di Lodovico il Moro*, F. Malaguzzi-Valeri, 604.





LE MOIS DE MAI  
(Pol de Limburg)



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disposition made her a favourite with all the members of the ducal family. Always *allegra e di bona voglia*, her presence was hailed with joy wherever she went. She was on the most intimate terms with the reigning Duke and Duchess, and frequently paid them visits at the Castello of Pavia, where Gian Galeazzo lived in luxury and idleness, dividing his time between his wife and his horses. In May 1493, when Beatrice had gone to Venice with her mother, Bianca came to join the Duke and Duchess, and found them amusing themselves after their wont at the villa of Mirabello, in the park of the Castello. Both Gian Galeazzo and Isabella welcomed her with effusion, and her coming was the signal for fresh games and merriment. After dinner, the princesses went out into the meadows, to join the peasants who were busy making hay, and pelted each other, and rolled over on the new-mown hay, amid shouts of laughter, until the sun sank behind the pinnacles of the Certosa. Then the Duke, picking up his wife on the pillion of his horse, galloped back to the Castello, followed by Bianca and her ladies, and after supper they all ended the evening merrily, picking asparagus and herbs for salad in the gardens.<sup>1</sup>

So they laughed and frolicked together, careless of

<sup>1</sup> *Malaguzzi-Valeri*, op. cit., 53. I would refer all readers who wish for fuller details of the private life of the Sforza princes to this valuable and finely illustrated work, published by Ulrico Hoepli, of Milan, in 1913.

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the coming morrow, and all unconscious of the doom which hung over them. That doom was nearer than they knew. In the autumn of the following year Gian Galeazzo died, worn out by his excesses, leaving the unhappy Isabella to eat out her heart in gloom and loneliness, while her rival, Beatrice, reigned in her stead, and the title of Count of Pavia, which her own child had borne, was assumed by Lodovico's son. Bianca was fondly attached to both of her little brothers, Maximilian and Francesco. Her name figures constantly in the daily reports of the Duke's children that were sent him by the chamberlain in charge, Giacomo Seregno, when he was absent at Pavia or Vigevano. On the 18th of April, 1495, Bianca herself wrote an affectionate letter to her father, telling him of her half-sister's, Margherita, illness, and how she had been helping her mother to nurse the little girl. Soon afterwards Beatrice's baby-boy, Francesco, fell ill in his turn, and Lodovico's most trusted physicians, Niccolò da Cusano and Ambrogio di Rosate, were sent to attend him. But he soon recovered, and one of his attendants, Francesco dal Maino, wrote to inform the Duke that Madonna Bianca had been to see his Highness, who was "looking as beautiful as a pearl." She kissed and petted him, and amused him for a long time in her arms, and was present at six o'clock when he had his bath. The little fellow was as merry as possible,

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splashing about in the water, and holding out his little hands to his sister as she bent down to caress him. "It really," adds the writer, "was the prettiest picture imaginable."<sup>1</sup>

A month later, on the 26th of May 1495, Lodovico was solemnly proclaimed Duke of Milan. Bianca was present at this ceremony, which took place on the piazza in front of the Duomo, and which Beatrice describes in her letters as "the grandest pageant and noblest solemnity in the world." The conclusion of peace with France, in the following autumn, left the Duke of Milan without a rival in Italy. His triumph seemed complete, and the Christmas festival was kept with great rejoicing at Milan. Galeazzo di San Severino laid down his command, and claimed the fulfilment of Lodovico's promise to let him have Bianca to wife. The Duke still hesitated, partly on account of her delicate health, and partly out of reluctance to part from the daughter whom he held as the apple of his eye, saying that he could not love her more dearly if she had been Beatrice's child. By the end of June, however, his consent was finally given, and Messer Galeaz led his bride home in triumph to his house in the Via de' Bossi. But the fatigue and excitement of the wedding festivities were too great a strain for Bianca's frail health. She fell seriously ill a few days after

<sup>1</sup> *Archivio di Stato, Milano, Potenze Sovrane, Sforza, 1495.*

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her marriage, and was carefully nursed and watched over by the Court-doctor, daily reports of her condition being sent to the Duke and Duchess, who had gone off hurriedly to meet the Emperor at Bormio, in the mountains of the Valtellina.

Bianca herself felt the keenest interest in this memorable meeting, which took place on the 29th of July, in the ancient Abbey of Mals, at the foot of what the Italian historian calls the *crudelissime montagne* of Tyrol. She sent Seregno to beg the nuns of the Monastero Maggiore to thank God for the success which had crowned her father's journey, and as soon as she could leave her bed went to pay her vows at Our Lady's shrine. But even this slight exertion proved beyond her strength, and she was once more confined to bed. The little Count of Pavia was untiring in attendance at his sister's bedside, giving her medicine with his own hands, and cheering her with his childish prattle.

Meanwhile the Emperor had once more crossed the Alps, promising to return shortly, and the Duke and Duchess hastened back to Milan, to keep the feast of the glorious martyr, St. Laurence, on the 10th of August. Galeazzo and Bianca both accompanied them the following week to Vigevano, and helped in the preparations that were being made for Maximilian's reception. He arrived on the 2nd of September, and

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spent the next three weeks in the company of Lodovico and Beatrice and their children, enjoying the freedom of country life and the excellent hunting which he found at the Duke's superb country-seat.

A fortnight later the Venetian ambassadors, Antonio Grimani and Marco Morosini, arrived at Vigevano to pay their respects to the Emperor, and were conducted by the Duke himself to the fine new palace near the Porta Nuova, which Leonardo had lately built for Bianca and her lord. Messer Galeaz was unluckily confined to his bed by a sharp attack of fever, and it was his young wife who welcomed her father's guests, and did the honours of her house with the most winning grace.

The historian, Marino Sanudo, who was attached to the Venetian Embassy, has described the audience granted by the Emperor to the envoys on the following day. His Imperial Majesty, a magnificent-looking man with commanding presence and whitening locks, clad in black velvet and wearing the collar of the Golden Fleece, received the ambassadors, seated on a dais draped with cloth of gold, between the Duke of Milan and the Cardinal-legate. The Venetian secretary was profoundly impressed by Maximilian's stately courtesy, and by Beatrice's devotion to her children and husband, whose side she seldom left, and whom she helped in all the negotiations which

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he had to transact with foreign envoys. The proceedings ended with a grand hunting-party, in which the ladies and ambassadors all joined, after which Maximilian took leave of his illustrious hosts and went on to Pisa to conduct a campaign against Florence.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of September, Galeazzo recovered sufficiently to accompany his wife to her dower-city of Voghera, where the loyal citizens received the newly-wedded pair with enthusiasm, and made them many rich presents. Early in November they returned to Milan, and settled in the Palace of the Via de' Bossi for the winter. They found Leonardo and Bramante busy superintending the latest improvements and additions to the Castello, and by the Duke's orders large fires were lighted in the new rooms of the Rochetta, to dry the walls before the Duchess returned for her approaching confinement. On the 8th of November, Galeazzo, who had never quite shaken off his troublesome ague, rode out with Bianca to take the air at La Bicocca, a fine hunting-lodge belonging to Guido Archimboldi, the Archbishop of Milan. After dining there, they both went out hunting and killed a hare, which they brought home to Milan. At the Duke's suggestion, his son-in-law went to Cussago a few days later, and rode on by Abbiategrasso to join Lodovico at Vigevano, and confer with him, before the Duke

<sup>1</sup> *M. Sanudo Diarii*, i. 304-9.



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started on his journey to meet the Emperor at Pavia. But on the 22nd of November, the very day that he arrived at the Castello of Vigevano, Galeazzo was hastily summoned back to Milan, by the news of his wife's sudden illness. Lodovico himself was so much alarmed that he put off his departure for Pavia, and sent a courier to Milan to bring back the latest accounts of his daughter.

"I know," he wrote to his son-in-law, "that since you are back in Milan, Bianca will have every possible care and attention. But as Maestro Ambrogio and the other doctors are with you, you might send Maestro Luigi here to-night, to bring me full particulars."

An hour later a servant arrived at Vigevano to tell the Duke that all was over. The poor child never recovered from the fainting-fit which had alarmed her attendants on the previous morning, and died at five o'clock on the 23rd of November. Beatrice met the messenger at the Castle gates, and in her grief and dismay sent for Cardinal Ascanio Sforza to break the news to his brother. But it was too late to hide the sad event from Lodovico, and all the Duchess could do was to beg the Archbishop to come and comfort him.

When the first shock was over, Lodovico displayed his usual fortitude and spent the night in writing letters and giving orders for the funeral. A few

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weeks before, his son Leone had died suddenly, and had been buried in S. Maria delle Grazie, the Church of the Dominican friars, in whose refectory Leonardo was in the act of painting his great Cenacolo.

Now Lodovico wrote to the Archbishop and Castellan of Milan, desiring that his daughter should be laid to rest in the same place.

“Since it has pleased God to take our Bianca to Himself, to our inexpressible sorrow, I wish her to be buried in the choir of S. Maria delle Grazie. After sunset this evening, let her be borne through the gardens of the Castello to the Church, and see that the gates of the Castello are closed and guarded, so that no one should know what is going on. In all other particulars, let the same order be observed as in the funeral of our son Leone. Only, as I do not wish Bianca to be buried in a place where I can see her grave, you will take care that she is laid exactly behind the high altar of Le Grazie, in such a manner that her tomb shall not be seen from the rest of the church.”<sup>1</sup>

These orders were faithfully carried out, the only exception being that the Councillors and Magistrates who had been already invited to attend the funeral carried the bier by turns, from the Chapel of the Castello to the gates of the Dominican Church. Here Bianca Sforza was laid to rest before the high altar of the Capella Grande, under Bramante's fair cupola.

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. di Stato*, Potenze Sovrane, 1496.

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Eight days afterwards a solemn requiem for the repose of her soul was chanted in the Duomo, in the presence of the whole Court, as well as of the College of Physicians and other Orders, "as is the custom in the case of princes of the lamented Madonna Bianca's high degree," and a funeral oration was delivered by Matteo Bossi.

The Duke's first thought, in his own overwhelming grief, had been for his son-in-law, whose sorrow at his young wife's sudden death would he knew be excessive, and he charged the Archbishop and Castellan, Benedetto da Corte, to go to Messer Galeaz' immediately after the funeral, with a message of consolation and hope.

"Tell him," he wrote, "that since human aid is of no avail in this bitter and unexpected loss, we implore him to restrain the violence of his sorrow and try and bear this cruel blow with the patience that we ourselves are striving to attain. And tell him, what he knows already, that he will always remain most dear to us, and that we shall never cease to regard him as a most beloved son."

Galeazzo's grief was indeed terrible. He shut himself up in his room, refusing to eat and drink, or take any air or exercise, and gave way to such violent paroxysms of despair, that fears for his life and reason were entertained. In vain the Archbishop and Castellan tried to rouse him from his stupor, telling him that the

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Duke needed his counsel in affairs of State and begging him to come to his side, in order that they might share their burden together and console each other. But Galeazzo replied that the blow was too heavy and his distress was too great for him to see anyone, and after a brief interview they left him alone. By degrees, however, the violence of his grief diminished, and he was induced to take food and see his friends. A week later, Bernardino de Corte was able to inform the Duke that Messer Galeaz had been persuaded by his physician and servants to leave Milan and go to Abbiategrasso for a few days' change of air.

In justice to Lodovico, it must be said that in his own sorrow he did not forget poor Bianca's mother. The letter which he addressed on this occasion to his former mistress, Bernardina de' Corradis, is a curious example of the good feeling and thoughtfulness that often surprise us in this singular man.

"Although," he wrote, "we cannot speak of the sudden death of our darling child, Bianca, without the bitterest anguish, yet since you are her mother, we feel that it would be a grave failure of duty on our part if we did not inform you of this sad event with our own hand, this being unlike any other loss that has befallen us. Yesterday morning, at nine o'clock, having been apparently in perfect health up to this hour, she fell into a sudden fainting-fit, and in spite of all that the doctors could do for her,

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grew steadily worse, until at five o'clock this evening she ended her life on earth. This event has caused us the most unutterable grief, both for the loss of such a daughter and because the blow was so sudden and unexpected. We know that it will be a great shock to your heart, but we must bear with patience the trials that are sent us here, and bow to the unalterable laws of nature. We entreat you, therefore, to bear this loss with patience and courage, and assure you that you will be no less beloved by us in future, than if Bianca were yet alive."<sup>1</sup>

At the same time Lodovico sent a characteristic letter to his most trusted physician and astrologer, Maestro Ambrogio, begging him to make a careful inquiry into the causes of Bianca's death, and expressing his conviction that the Court doctors had mistaken the nature of her ailment and had given her wine and other remedies, which being hurtful to the brain, only aggravated her condition and hastened the end.

Beatrice's grief for her step-daughter was scarcely less than that of her lord. During the last few months, her own life had been embittered by the Duke's sudden fancy for one of her youthful ladies-in-waiting, Lucrezia Crivelli, and the tears that she wept for Bianca were mingled with sorrowful forebodings of coming trouble. In a little note, written

<sup>1</sup> *Archivio di Stato*, Milan. *Potenze Sovrane, Sforza*, 1496.

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from Vigevano, she told her sister Isabella the sad news in these touching words:

“Although my lord Duke will no doubt himself inform you of the premature death of Madonna Bianca, his daughter and the wife of Messer Galeaz, I must write a few lines with my own hand, to tell you how great is the distress and trouble which her death has caused me. The loss indeed is greater than I can express, because of the place which she held in my heart. May God have her soul in His keeping.”<sup>1</sup>

The same lamentations were heard on all sides. Niccolò da Correggio, Beatrice's loyal courtier, wrote an elegy on Bianca's death, in which he gave expression to the general sorrow that was felt for the dear maid who had gone to join the blessed spirits, in the flower of her youth, and for the gallant husband whom a cruel fate had so early robbed of his bride. Even the dull, cold Empress Bianca was deeply moved, and in a letter which she wrote to her uncle, expressed the greatest regret for the loss of “this beloved cousin and sister.” Her imperial lord showed heartfelt sympathy for the bereaved father, when Lodovico and Beatrice met him at Pavia, clad in deep mourning. All the festivities in honour of his visit were countermanded, and Lodo-

<sup>1</sup> Luzio-Remier in *Archivio St. Lomb.*, xvii. 639.

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vico availed himself of the excuse to take his leave shortly and return to Milan with his wife. Everyone noticed the change in the young Duchess, who seemed to have lost all her usual spirits and remained plunged in silent grief. She visited Santa Maria delle Grazie daily, and spent many hours in prayer before the altar where Bianca slept. On the 2nd of January she drove to the church as usual, and lingered long by her step-daughter's grave, rapt in sorrowful musings, heedless of the entreaties of her ladies, who begged her to come away. The same night she breathed her last, after giving birth to a dead son, and the following evening she was laid to rest before the high altar, where she had lately been kneeling at Bianca's tomb.

The Duke's grief for the wife whom in spite of neglect and unkindness he held dearer than life—"la sua amantissima Duchessa"—was deep and lasting, and his constancy amazed both friends and foes. On that fatal evening, when the French were at the gates of Milan and Lodovico was about to fly for his life, he spent the last hour before his departure in prayer by Beatrice's grave, and turned back three times to take a farewell look at the church which held the ashes of the wife and daughter whom he had loved so well.

In these dark days, Bianca's widowed husband,

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Galeazzo, remained faithful to his father-in-law, whatever may have been said or written to the contrary. He was more of a carpet-knight than a leader of men, and his generalship does not appear to have been of a high order, while the defection of his brother, the Count of Caiazzo, with the best part of the ducal army, was a heavy blow. But his personal courage and loyalty were beyond suspicion, and if, even then, Lodovico had followed his son-in-law's advice, and put himself at the head of his remaining forces, his fortunes might yet have been retrieved. Unfortunately, at this critical moment the Moro's nerve failed him, and he fled across the Alps, leaving the Castello, with all its stores and treasures, to be betrayed to the French by a faithless servant. Galeazzo followed the Duke into exile, and after taking a leading part in Lodovico's desperate attempt to recover Milan, shared his captivity when, after the catastrophe of Novara, he fell into the hands of the Swiss. More fortunate than the Moro, Galeazzo was ransomed a few weeks later by his powerful relatives, and joined the other Milanese exiles at the Imperial Court. In October 1501 the Venetian, Marino Sanudo, met him at Trent, and describes him as clad in deep mourning and looking very pale, with empty pockets and a sorrowful mien. "The Germans," adds Sanudo, "hold him of small account, but he



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is always with His Imperial Majesty, who seems very fond of him.”<sup>1</sup>

In the following year Galeazzo was sent to Paris by the Emperor to conduct negotiations for the release of Lodovico with the French King, and exerted himself actively on the captive prince's behalf. But on this point Louis XII was inflexible, and when all efforts to obtain the unhappy Duke's deliverance proved vain, the good offices of Cardinal di San Severino obtained leave for his brother to return to Milan. Here Galeazzo quickly won the friendship of the powerful Viceroy, Georges d'Amboise, Cardinal de Rouen, who in 1505 gave him back the houses and lands which he had formerly owned, including his wife's dower-city of Voghera. A year later he followed the Cardinal to the French Court, where he soon rose high in the King's favour, and was appointed Grand Ecuyer, and Knight of the Order of S. Michel. In 1507, he accompanied Louis to Milan, and was a conspicuous figure in the tournament that was held on the Piazza del Castello, the scene of his former exploits. Here he met many old friends whom he had known at Lodovico's Court—the painter Leonardo and the Marchioness Isabella, who was herself present at the banquet in the Rocchetta, and with the strange callousness that marked the men and women of this age, danced with King Louis in the

<sup>1</sup> *Diarii*, iv. 129.

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very halls which had been the home of her lamented sister.

For a long time Galeazzo remained faithful to Bianca's memory, and refused many brilliant offers of marriage, including one from Caterina Sforza, the famous Madonna of Forli, who proposed to give him her daughter's hand. But after his return to Milan with the French, he married a lady of the house of Carretto, the daughter of the Marchese del Finale, and spent most of his time at Genoa.<sup>1</sup> He afterwards became a great favourite of Francis I, and accompanied this monarch in all his campaigns. But he still remained on friendly terms with the Gonzagas, and was always a welcome guest at the courts of Mantua and Urbino.

Castiglione, who had known Messer Galeaz in his most triumphant days, when "the flower of the men of this world were assembled in the Castello of Milan," always looked upon him as a peerless knight, and enshrined his name, as the mirror of chivalry, in the pages of his *Cortegiano*. To the last Galeazzo retained his courage and skill as a rider and jouster, until he died, fighting by his royal master's side, on the fatal field of Pavia. A young squire, who saw him fall from his horse, rushed to the rescue, but the hero only shook his head and told him that it was too late. "Go to the

<sup>1</sup> F. Sansovino, *Della Origine delle famigli illustri d'Italia*, 316.

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King's help," he said with a smile, "and tell the world that I died a soldier's death." An hour later he breathed his last in the park at Mirabello, within sight of the Castello where some of his happiest days had been spent with his child-wife, Bianca Sforza.

## THE CERTOSA OF VAL D'EMA, FLORENCE

"Great are the pleasures of the monks who dwell there, greater still are the pleasures of those who having seen all can go away."—PIUS II.

ON the Siena road, three miles from the Porta Romana, stands the ancient Certosa of Florence. Less famous than her sister of Pavia, the Tuscan monastery is rich in historical interest and treasures of art. She has her paintings, her tombs, and sculptures ; round her walls cluster the traditions of many ages ; illustrious dead rest within her churches. Inferior to her rival in architectural splendour, the beauty of her situation far surpasses that of the Pavian Certosa. Placed on the summit of a picturesque hill in an angle formed by the junction of the torrents of Ema and Greve, the imposing range of her buildings, with towers, battlements, and Gothic windows, strikes the eye of the traveller, and appears to him some grand mediæval fortress crowning the heights. Olive and cypress groves grow along the hillside ; at its feet nestles the little village of Galluzzo, which Dante sung of long ago ; and on either side of the torrent fair Val d'Ema spreads her gardens of rose, and vine, and corn. From their cloisters the monks

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of the Certosa look down on the valley of Florence. They can see suns set over her towers and the violet glow of the plains reaching out towards Pistoja and the Apennines. Beyond, behind the topmost tiers of Giotto's campanile, rises the white-walled steep of Fiesole, and far away on the right, often fringed with snow, are the mountains of Vallombrosa. All around are great memories, scenes and names celebrated in Florentine story. On the opposite hills stands Poggio Imperiale, the villa of the Grand Dukes, with its long avenue of ilex and cypress ; further on are the tower where Galileo watched the stars, and San Miniato, from whose ramparts Michelangelo defended the republic. Older than any of these, already famous in days when the Medici and Michelangelo were unheard of, the Certosa was founded by a Florentine of an earlier age, a man who, although he left his home young to become great in another sphere, never forgot that he was a citizen of Florence, and came back at last to be laid in his own convent on Tuscan soil.

Few figures in the history of the fourteenth century command our attention more than that of Niccolò Acciaiuoli, Grand Seneschal of the kingdom of Naples. We see him conspicuous among the crowd of petty destinies around him, firm and unmoved as a rock in the midst of confusion and strife, controlling conflicting elements by the force of his character, retrieving the fortunes of a royal house, and saving a

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kingdom from anarchy by his single exertions. We see him by turns successful as a general, eminent as a statesman, distinguished by an unalterable fidelity to his prince, splendid in his alms and foundations, the patron of learning, the friend of Petrarch.

To this remarkable man the Certosa of Val d'Ema owes her existence. The whole story of her foundation is so closely connected with Niccolò's fortunes, and forms so interesting an episode in his career, that a brief sketch of his life may not be out of place here.

Originally steel workers driven from Brescia by the invasion of Barbarossa, the Acciaiuoli were already one of the most powerful of Florentine merchant-houses when in 1310 Niccolò was born at a villa on the hill of Montegufoni, in Val di Pesa, some miles to the west of Florence. His father, Acciaiuolo Acciaiuoli, married him to Margherita degli Spini at the age of eighteen, and three years afterwards sent him to Naples, where he had opened a house for the purpose of advancing loans to King Robert. Here the striking beauty of his person, his chivalrous accomplishments and ready wit, won general favour at court, and attracted the notice of Robert, who appointed him guardian of his nephews, the young sons of Catherine, the widowed princess of Taranto, and titular Empress of Constantinople. In 1338 he led a successful expedition into Greece to recover the dominions of these princes from the

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Turks, on which occasion he first displayed his military and administrative talents. Having conquered the Morea, and obtained the recognition of Catherine's eldest son Robert as Prince of Achaia, at the end of three years Niccolò returned to Naples, where he was received with great honour, and sent as ambassador to Florence.

It was during this visit to his native city that he founded the Certosa. Already, as he took farewell of his wife and children when starting on his perilous expedition against the Turks, the wish to build a convent near Florence had arisen in his mind, as we know from the will he left behind him—a curious and elaborate document, of which the original Italian version is still preserved in the archives of the Certosa. After providing for his wife and children, and directing alms to be given and masses to be said not only for his own soul, but for every member of his family with the most scrupulous care, he proceeds to set apart a portion of his revenue for the endowment of this Certosa to be erected on a site chosen by a certain Carthusian monk, Frate Amico, under the patronage of his four favourite saints, Messer Michele Agnolo, Messer Niccolò, Lorenzo, and Benedetto. “And I beg of you, Acciaiuolo, my father,” he adds, “to execute faithfully my will in this respect, and to have more care of my soul and yours than of my sons, for

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if they are honest they will have greater possessions than they need, and if they are worthless they will not remember my soul, and it will be better they should have little than much, therefore I ask you for God's sake to provide well for my soul and your own."

Niccolò's resolve proved more sincere than most pious intentions, and no sooner had he returned safely from his crusade, than without a moment's delay he applied himself to the execution of his plan.

On the 8th of February 1342 the deed of gift was drawn up by which he endowed the Carthusian monks with all his lands in Val d'Ema; and immediately afterwards, or it may have been even before, the foundations of the new monastery were laid on the hill—Monte Aguto, between the rivers Greve and Ema. Convent-church and buildings were at once begun on a large scale; but the name of the architect of the Certosa is still unknown. Tradition ascribes this honour to Orgagna, but Vasari, in his life of this artist, owns that the true architect has never been discovered; and it seems more probable that a Carthusian monk, Fra Jacopo Passavanti, to whom frequent allusion is made in Niccolò's letters, furnished the plans. While the walls of the Certosa were slowly rising from the ground, public events occupied all the founder's attention, and diverted his thoughts for a time from his favourite project.



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The death of King Robert in 1343, and the accession of his daughter Joanna and her weak husband, Andrea of Hungary, plunged the kingdom of Naples into a state of anarchy, deplored by Petrarch in his letters. Two years afterwards Andrea was murdered, whether with or without the Queen's connivance; and at the end of another two years Joanna married Louis of Taranto, the second of the Empress Catherine's sons. From the time of Robert's death Niccolò had taken no part in public affairs, but he appears to have been instrumental in bringing about this marriage, in which he probably saw not only the advancement of his pupil to the throne, but the best hope for the peace of the realm. At first, however, the consequences of the step proved disastrous to the parties concerned. The barons rose in arms against the Queen; the King of Hungary, armed with Papal excommunications, invaded Naples as the avenger of his brother's murder. Joanna took ship for Provence; and Louis of Taranto, deserted by all his followers saving the faithful Niccolò, fled with him to Siena, and found a refuge in Acciaiuoli's own villa at Monte Gufoni. While the two wandered from city to city, vainly endeavouring to obtain supplies of men and money, the Hungarian king became master of Naples, and all the fortresses in the country were surrendered into his hands, with the single exception of the citadel

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of Melfi, which Niccolò's eldest son, Lorenzo, then scarcely more than a boy, defended valiantly during a long siege. But the victor's triumph was destined to prove of short duration, and in a few months, alarmed by an outbreak of plague at Naples, he returned home, leaving a German governor to rule the province.

Meanwhile, Niccolò having successfully pleaded Louis and Joanna's cause at Avignon, and collected a fleet at his own expense, landed at Naples with the king and queen, who entered the city in the month of August 1348. They found the unhappy kingdom a prey to the ravages of Hungarians and free companies, but by degrees the efforts of Niccolò, now Grand Seneschal of the realm, met with success, and at length, on the 27th of May 1352, Louis of Taranto was crowned at Naples with great solemnity.

It was on this occasion that Petrarch—who, although not personally acquainted with Niccolò, had been seized with admiration for his great qualities, and saw in him the deliverer of Naples—addressed his famous letter to the Grand Seneschal, congratulating him on the triumph of his arms, and giving him admirable advice for the guidance of his royal pupil in all things necessary to his own welfare and public good.

“At length, you have conquered, O Signor,” he begins; “at length the battle ceases, treachery yields

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to faith, pride to humility, despair to hope, and, vanquished by the power of fortitude, every obstacle disappears. Lately we saw you offer an heroic resistance to the frowns of Fortune; now we behold you her conqueror. Now the royal youth—sole object of your cares and efforts—receives the crown, and before his countenance the clouds which darkened the face of Italy shall melt away, the tears of the nation shall be dried, and lost peace—long sighed after—shall return to the distracted kingdom.”

He goes on to inform both king and minister that as the rose is surrounded by thorns so the path of glory is beset with difficulties, and exhorts Louis to follow the examples of his uncle, King Robert, and to learn of Niccolò piety towards God, love of his country, and the practice of virtue, advice which Petrarch lived to regret had been given in vain.

Numerous letters, still extant, bear witness to the friendship which existed between Petrarch and the Grand Seneschal, and prove the high estimation in which this distinguished man was held by the poet and his friends. For although Niccolò's life had been spent in the active discharge of public duties both in camp and court, his natural genius supplied the want of scholarship, and there was a grace and charm about his letters that excited the wonder of Petrarch, and made him declare, in writing to another friend, that eloquence was more the fruit of nature than of study.

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But the great soldier was far from despising learning ; on the contrary, he devoted every moment of leisure to the study not only of contemporary but of ancient literature. We find him quoting Seneca and bringing forward numerous instances from Roman history in his letters, while Boccaccio relates how, during his wars in Sicily, he actually composed a history of the Crusades in the French language, of which, unfortunately, nothing more is known. Above all, he delighted in the society of poets and men of letters, and endeavoured by every means in his power to bring Petrarch to live at Naples, sending him the most pressing invitations again and again, and promising him a new Parnassus between Salerno and Vesuvius. In this he never succeeded, but many of Petrarch's dearest friends, Francesco Nelli, Zanobi da Strada, Giovanni Barili, were his constant guests and chosen companions. So also at times was Boccaccio, who, although he frequently lived at his charge and dedicated his work on illustrious women to Niccolò, was not always satisfied with the treatment he received from the Grand Seneschal's dependants, and makes bitter complaints of the neglect he suffered on one occasion. But of all these, the friend whom Niccolò most loved and valued was Zanobi da Strada, a Florentine poet, who, little known to posterity, seems to have been famous in his own day and received the

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laurel crown from the hands of the Emperor Charles IV. For him the Grand Seneschal had a deep and tender affection, which nothing could ever impair ; and the letter which he wrote on the poet's death is a touching memorial of an intimacy honourable to both men. Genuine sorrow for his friend is mingled with lamentation over the loss sustained by the world in the death of a poet, the like of whom had not arisen for perhaps a thousand years, " saving only one other, Messer Francesco Petrarcho."

" No gift of all that Fortune has bestowed upon me in this world do I hold equal to the friendship of this man. He chose me and I chose him as friend, in all things our souls agreed together. Leaving his country, his home, and his kinsfolk, at my request he gladly followed me. When he was present we took sweet counsel together ; in his absence his letters were my joy and delight. As I read I saw my friend and felt all the nobility of his soul, the graces with which God had filled this divine spirit. But since the clearness of his intellect could distinguish things unseen through the mists of this life, since while my excellent friend lived he saw what was hidden and recognised the vanity of this world, he is now come to the place where he lives and will live for ever, and I am there with him. Inseparable were our souls and inseparable will they remain."

Like the poet of *In Memoriam*, he notes the different phases of grief, and from the contemplation

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of all that made his friendship pleasant, from regret for all that has been and can never be again, he passes to consider the high teaching of death and the many things which he has learnt by the removal of his friend to another life. He concludes with a generous assurance to the Florentine Landolfo to whom the letter is addressed, and who had been intimate with Zanobi, that he will henceforth do his utmost to supply his dead friend's place. "And now, since the time is short, and the space between Zanobi's departure and my own will not be long, I will say no more but this only, that another Messer Zanobi remains to you, that is I, the great Seneschal."

Zanobi's saying, "*Qui mortem metuit cupit nihil*," quoted by Niccolò in this letter, and also rendered, "*Contempsit omnia ille qui mortem prius*," was adopted by him as his motto, and is still to be seen on the Grand Seneschal's tomb at the Certosa.

It is this gentler side of Niccolò's nature, this strong human tenderness breaking out here and there in his letters, wherever we get a glimpse of his inner feelings, which renders his character so attractive. And as in his friendships so in all his private relations, whether as husband, son, or father, we find the same marks of deep and lasting affection for those connected with him. On the point of embarking for Greece he sends back a ring to his wife, Mona Margherita, and

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in his will he remembers his mother long dead, and appoints masses to be said for her soul. As long as his father lived he paid him the most dutiful attention, and on his death caused his remains to be interred in the chapel reserved for his own sepulchre at the Certosa, where Niccolò's sister Lapa, for whom he had an especial fondness, is also buried. With the same faithfulness he clung to everything belonging to his early days, and in one of his later letters he stops in the details of business to tell his kinsman to buy back the houses of the Acciaiuoli at Monte Gufoni which had passed into other hands, "if they are not too dear," since he would, if possible, erect a chapel on the spot where he was born.

All through his life he retained the beauty of countenance and majesty of bearing which distinguished him as a youth. Fair-haired and of tall stature, with a broad, serene brow and a peculiar brightness in his eye, his presence commanded respect and inspired even his enemies with awe. In the corrupt court to which he came while yet a youth, he remained untainted by the evil influences around him, and, Sismondi tells us, preserved the purity of republican morals. The exalted station which he occupied rendered him naturally the object of envy and calumny, but he recked little of the ill-will shown him, and treated slander with the scorn it deserved.

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At the same time he knew how to forgive, and when wounded by a Neapolitan, who resented an act of justice on his part, himself obtained the man's pardon from the king. Unfortunately, with all these fine qualities there was a haughtiness about him, an utter carelessness of the opinion of men, which occasionally became irritating to those around him, and was the cause of quarrels with his best friends. This it was, probably, which wounded Boccaccio, and finally estranged even Petrarch. In the same way, his love of splendour gave great offence on one occasion to the Florentines, who regarded the banquets and entertainments which he gave in their city as ill becoming the severity of republican simplicity. And yet this same man, who delighted in stately pageants and splendid festivities, and appeared in public in a silken tunic worked with feathers and gold, was remarkable in private life for the simplicity of his attire and the frugality of his repasts, being often heard to say that state was to be used not for the honour of the individual, but for the dignity of the office and majesty of the crown.

But there was in reality a natural magnificence about the man which appears in all his actions. It was not only that he took pleasure in pomp and delighted to accumulate lands and titles, but everything he did was marked by the same love of splendour and



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planned on the same vastness of scale. Churches, convents, altars, in Greece, in Naples, and Tuscany are to perpetuate his name ; hundreds of poor are to be clothed yearly in memory of his father ; masses to be said by thousands for the repose of his soul and those dear to him. The whole of his lands in the Val d'Ema are to endow the Certosa, and the convent itself is to be the finest in Italy.

The real greatness of the man was best shown in the hour of trial. However extreme the peril, however sudden the emergency, his serenity never forsook him. His fortitude in defeat and exile excited general admiration, and his biographers speak with wonder of his behaviour on hearing of his son Lorenzo's death. This, his eldest son, described as "a youth of a most lovely countenance, tried in arms, and eminent for his graceful manners and his gracious and noble aspect," was Niccolò's pride and joy, the darling of his heart, and hope of his house. Already he had won his first laurels in the defence of Melfi ; and now he had received the honour of knighthood and been betrothed to a daughter of the proud house of Sanseverino, when a sudden death cut him off in the flower of his manhood. The Grand Seneschal was at Gaeta, providing for the defence of the realm, when the news reached him. For a moment his constancy forsook him, and, strong man as he was, he quailed under the

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blow. His head sank on his breast, and the persons who were present held their peace, awestruck in the presence of his great sorrow. Then he lifted his head slowly and stood erect before them all.

“ My grief is hard to bear,” he said, “ because I loved him too well. Yet, dearly as I loved him, I knew that he must die some day ; and God, who knows best, has called him for his eternal welfare. Farewell, then ; since it is His will, farewell for ever, my most dear Lorenzo ! ” After this one passionate cry he recovered his usual serenity, and gave orders that his son’s corpse should be borne to Florence to receive the last honours.

On the 7th of April 1354 a splendid train of knights and squires, with flying banners and shields blazoned with the Acciaiuoli arms—a silver lion rampant on an azure field—issued from the Porta San Pier Gattolini, now the Porta Romana, followed by the noblest citizens of Florence. In the midst, on a bier hung with crimson velvet and cloth of gold, under a canopy of embroidered silk, the body of the young hero was borne in state, surrounded by horsemen in rich attire carrying lighted torches. So the procession passed along Val d’Ema and wound its way up the steep hillside to the gates of the Certosa, where, in the newly erected chapel of St. Tobias, chosen by Niccolò as the place of his own sepul-



*Photo: Alinari, Florence*

# TOMB OF LORENZO ACCIAIUOLI

(Certosa di Val d'Ema)



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chre, the last remains of his beloved child were laid.

“This funeral,” says the chronicler, Matteo Villani, from whom these details are borrowed, “magnificent enough for any prince, were he even of blood royal, we have recorded because it was a new and strange thing in Florence, which excited much attention, and cost upwards of five thousand gold florins.”

At the close of the funeral solemnity, Niccolò, turning to his friends, desired them henceforth to speak no more of his son's sudden and bitter end, lest any fresh reminder should revive the old pain. His grief thus stifled, he returned to Naples to make new conquests and subdue more enemies. But from this time his letters breathe a saddened tone, and the Certosa becomes more than ever the object of his interest. How constantly the thought of his convent, now doubly precious to him, filled his mind, how yearningly, amid the stress of public business, his heart turned to that “place of blessed repose,” we see in the letters addressed during 1355 and 1356 to his kinsmen Jacopo Acciaiuoli and Andrea Buondelmonti, whom he had entrusted with the superintendence of the works still in progress there.

“Jacopo, I say to you that all my consolations centre in our monastery; all trouble and vexations

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bring me back to find comfort there. When I think of it, anger and grief flee away. I possess nothing that is really my own but this Certosa, and if I had money I would make it the most famous place in Italy ; but if I live four more years, and fortune is not too contrary, I still hope that I may be able to make it beautiful."

For this purpose, he is constantly sending large sums of money, and however hard pressed he finds himself, repeats his injunctions that the monastery is on no account to suffer.

"Think not," he writes again, "that because the work is costly I shall like it less, for all other substance that I possess will pass to my successors. Who they may be I care not, but this monastery with all its adornings will be mine for all time, and will keep my memory green and everlasting in Florence. And if, as Monsignor the Chancellor (his kinsman, the Bishop Angelo Acciaiuoli) has it, the soul is immortal, my soul will rejoice over this Certosa, wherever she is ordered to go. Therefore, I pray of you to seek the perfection of the whole as much as lies in your power, and I will on my part do all I can to supply you with the necessary means."

Nothing is to be neglected ; Niccolò provides in turn for the fortification of the convent, a very necessary thing in those stormy days, for the adorning of its altars with pearls and precious stones, for the building of hospital, *forestiera*, and halls in which the monks

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may practise different trades, and for spacious gardens where they may take recreation. Annexed to the monastery was a noble building, with battlements and a quadrangle, destined to receive fifty scholars with professors and lecturers, for whose use Niccolò had formed a large library of manuscripts, but this institution was unfortunately not kept up by the Grand Seneschal's heirs. What, however, occupied his attention more than all at this time was the building of a house adjoining the monastery, which he intended as a residence for himself. He dwells with the greatest delight and affection on this his "dear *abitaculo*, from which he would not part, for all the lands round Florence," and gives the minutest directions for the building of kitchen, loggia, halls, and even chimney-pieces. Everything is to be broad and spacious, the garden as beautiful as it is possible to make it, the vaulting of the rooms very lofty, since in his eyes the finest feature in a building is great height and space. In all his letters he presses on the completion of his "*abitaculo*," and expresses his anxiety that all should be ready when the time comes for him to leave public life. Then, if only God grant him this desire of his heart, he hopes to retire there and spend his last days unvexed by the clash of arms and the turmoil of the world, in this peaceful retreat, with only the company of the monks,

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the quiet round of the Church's offices, and the loveliness of Val d'Ema to be his solace.

But this time never came. To the end of his days he led the same busy, active life ; and a hurried visit here and there was all that he had to bestow on his beloved Certosa. Neither king nor realm could spare him. Louis and Joanna were both too incapable to govern alone ; and " whenever," says Villani, " the virtue of this man was absent from court, affairs went ill."

From the grave of his son he had gone straight to Sicily, to conquer that island from the Aragonese, and had already subdued Palermo and Messina, when he was recalled and sent as ambassador to the Emperor Charles IV, whose descent into Italy had created general alarm. His mission met with complete success ; and the Emperor not only paid him the highest honours and kept him to attend his coronation at Rome, but tried to induce him to accompany him on his return to Germany, an invitation which Niccolò, faithful to his old allegiance, refused to accept. On another occasion, when he was sent to the Papal Court at Avignon in 1360, Innocent VI presented him with the golden rose, a mark of special favour hitherto reserved for royal personages. From Avignon he went to Milan to negotiate a peace between the Pope and Bernabo Visconti, and there sought out his old friend



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Petrarch in his retreat at the monastery of S. Simpliciano, two miles from the town. This meeting between the Grand Seneschal and the poet, who had so long admired and honoured him, is best described in Petrarch's own letter to Zanobi da Strada :

“Thy Mecenas has paid a visit to my Augustus, and also, I am proud to say, to me. Without fear of stooping from his high station, twice he entered my library, regardless of the crowd which thronged around him, or the multitude of affairs and inconvenience of the distance, which to say the truth is great. Such were the majesty of his bearing, the courtesy of his manner, the earnestness of the first silence, and the first words, that not only myself, but all the illustrious personages present, were filled with reverence, and almost moved to tears. He was pleased to examine the books which are my companions, and here we reasoned of many things, but more than all of thee. Nor did he remain a short time, as is the custom of those who pay visits, but stayed so long with me that you would have thought he could hardly tear himself away, and by his presence he gave this poor threshold such splendour that it will certainly be famous for all time ; and all who come to see it, not only Romans and Florentines, but every lover of virtue, will regard it with devout veneration. Of him what more shall I tell you ? All this royal city was moved with joy at his coming, and from that serene brow joy and calm seemed to radiate. Welcomed by the Duke, beloved by the people, even more dear to me, although I loved him so well before that I

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held it scarcely possible to love him better ; so nobly did he bear himself, that the fame of him whom I had not seen was not diminished, but greatly increased by his presence. Live, therefore, happy in the possession of such a friend, and remember me."

Unfortunately, this friendship did not long survive Zanobi's death, which happened in the following year in 1362. Indeed, Petrarch wrote again to the Grand Seneschal, congratulating him on the conquest of Sicily which he had achieved, and rejoicing that he was allowed to call him friend.

"It would take the pen of Homer to record the glorious deeds by which you have restored peace to Sicily, and made Naples happy. Now Arethusa wakes to new joy, Etna restrains her fury, and Charybdis becomes mild out of reverence for your person. Continue, O great one, your illustrious career, adorned by so many virtues, more than all by that modesty which is your most splendid ornament, and which suffers me to call you friend."

He concludes by alluding to the death of King Louis, which had lately happened :

"Ah ! forgive me," he exclaims, "forgive me if in my grief I say that had he lived obediently to your counsels he would have led a happier life, met death gladder, and left a fairer memory behind him."

In the following year comes a letter of a different strain. Niccolò, it appears, had omitted to do

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him some service he had asked, some trifling favour that he had requested, whether for himself or for a friend, and, worse than this, had neglected to answer two previous letters on the subject. The poet had lately lost several of his dearest friends, Nelli, Zanobi, and others, which partly accounts for the querulous tone in which he writes. He upbraids Niccolò bitterly with injustice and neglect, and after warning him that, in spite of all his greatness, he too is mortal, concludes with the words: "Friendship is a fair and noble thing, but she requires much to be real. Nothing is easier than to call oneself a friend, nothing harder than to be one. Farewell, and forgive me if I speak too freely."

It would be interesting to know how the Grand Seneschal answered this letter, but, unfortunately, nothing after this is heard of their correspondence, and we are left to suppose that it ceased. Probably when Niccolò received Petrarch's complaint he was too deeply engaged to give it his attention, for, since the king's death the management of the kingdom rested entirely in the hands of the Grand Seneschal, who proved as faithful a servant to Joanna as he had been to her husband. Under his wise rule commerce began to revive and prosperity to return to the kingdom so long torn by civil wars and divisions.

But even now there were not wanting slanderous

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tongues to malign the great man, and the less his enemies dared use open violence, the more malice did they bear against him. It was to refute these slanders and to defend himself from the charge of appropriating rents due to the Papal See that he wrote the memorable letter to Angelo Acciaiuoli at Avignon, the original of which is still preserved in the Laurentian Library.

In this eloquent treatise, after clearing himself in the eyes of the Pope, he narrates his past history, and enumerates the services he had rendered to Robert of Naples, to Louis and Joanna, to the Church and people of Italy. There is still the same pride of character, the same contempt of base motives, of conscious sense of superiority to the men around him, the same old love of magnificence in the manner in which he heaps up the long roll of his exploits and services to cast them in the face of his accusers. But with it all there comes a touch of sadness, a conviction of the vanity of earthly greatness, as if he said to himself he had done all this, and had it been worth while? Certainly, in no other cause would he have risked so much and laboured so unceasingly—no, not for all the lands in Naples. And now that the greater part of his course is run, and the end draws every day nearer, he can say with truth in the words of the Apostle, "I have fought a good fight." All

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that he asks is justice, that justice which is not denied to heretics or Jews, and remarks in conclusion that were he as rich in substance as he is in enemies, the rents due to the Papal See by the Queen would soon be paid, Sicily subdued, and all the foes of the realm conquered. "But misery alone is without envy, and because we know not what it is we seek, all is for the best. Farewell."

Already in this letter, written from Melfi on the feast of St. Stephen, 1364, there was a foreboding of the coming end. A fever had then attacked him, which, however, passed off in a short time, but he only lived till the following November, when a few days' illness ended his career at the early age of fifty-five.

The suddenness of his death filled Naples with consternation at the moment. The prop of the kingdom was gone, the man who had saved the throne and restored peace to the Sicilies, and there was no one to fill up the gap which he had left.

In a short note Angelo Acciaiuoli, his son and successor in all his dignities, communicated the sad news to the prior of the Certosa, and the prayers of the whole Carthusian Order were asked for the soul of their illustrious benefactor. His own city of Florence was the first to do him honour, and paid magnificent homage to the memory of "this our most

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dear citizen." Afterwards, when his son Angelo was disgraced and imprisoned by the ungrateful Joanna, the Signory of Florence interfered on his behalf, and sent the Queen an indignant remonstrance, reproaching her for so grievously forgetting the services of the great man who had stood by her when all others forsook her, and had more than once shown how gladly he would have died in her cause. Matteo Palmieri, a scholar of the age of the Medici, wrote a history of the Grand Seneschal, and Andrea Castagno introduced his portrait among the life-sized figures of celebrated Italians which he painted for the Villa Pandolfini at Legnaia.

But it was still with the Certosa, as Niccolò had himself wished, that his memory was chiefly associated. There, according to the directions given in his will, his body, embalmed and brought from Naples, was laid to rest in the crypt by the side of his beloved Lorenzo. The best sculptors of the day, Orgagna's pupils, were employed to raise the Arca above his remains and carve his sleeping effigy as nearly as possible approaching to what he had been in life. There we see the Grand Seneschal, in full armour, reclining under a Gothic canopy of marble supported by spiral columns. The head rests on the embroidered pillow, and the hands are folded with the quiet consciousness that their work is done. The

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face is singularly noble, the serene brow, which had met so many perils in life unmoved, seems to have won a new majesty in the repose of death. Below, the lion rampant of the Acciaiuoli holds between his paws the Angevin fleur-de-lys, which Niccolò was privileged to wear, and a long inscription records his titles and great deeds, while on either side we read Zanobi's motto, "*Contempsit omnia ille qui mortem prius,*" and that other saying with which the Grand Seneschal was wont to console himself in dark days, "*Nescimus quia petamus, omnia pro meliori.*"

On the floor of the same chapel are three monumental slabs, which, although different in form, are almost equal to the former in beauty ; they are those of Acciaiuolo, his father, of his son Lorenzo, and of Lapa, his sister, the only woman to whom, by special favour, the right of burial in Niccolò's sepulchre was granted. All three are remarkable for the rich costumes and embroidery of the recumbent figures, in all three we see the same slender spiral columns and pointed arches. The effigy of Lorenzo is especially beautiful. The young knight sleeps in his coat of mail with his sword at his side, and his graceful head bent a little forward over his clasped hands. His flowing locks fall on his shoulders, and the intricate tracery of the armour is a marvel of delicate workmanship, as if the sculptor had lavished all the wealth of

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his art, by Niccolò's command, on this last memorial of the son he had loved so well. And as we stand by these tombs, where father and son rest in their long slumber, we feel that Niccolò's words have come true, and that after all this Certosa is his most lasting monument. Since his time whole dynasties have risen and fallen in the Sicilies, change has succeeded change, and kingdoms have been swept away, till not a trace of his work remains to bring back his name to men's lips. But at the end of these five hundred years every traveller who, walking through Val d'Ema, sees the long pile of buildings lifting their battlements against the sky, and asks who founded the Certosa, receives for answer—"Niccolò Acciaiuoli, the Grand Seneschal."

We see it now in the days of its decay, but for many hundred years after Niccolò's death the Certosa was one of the most celebrated monastic foundations in Italy. Like other Tuscan convents, it became the home of art, a sphere where the painters of different schools and ages were invited to display their powers.

In that same chapel of the Acciaiuoli, not many years after the great Seneschal's death, a young Dominican friar from the convent of Fiesole painted his first works, and introduced some angels playing musical instruments, whose exceeding beauty attracted universal attention, and were before long to



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earn for him the name of the "Angelic painter." These have disappeared, and a few pictures by Giotteschi artists are all that remain of fourteenth century art, but the Chapter-house contains a beautiful fresco of the Crucifixion by Mariotto Albertinelli. Here, then, he came, the gay pleasure-loving artist, whose restless nature was always craving after new excitement and who soon afterwards gave up painting to keep a tavern, because he preferred receiving praises for his good wine to hearing harsh censures on his pictures. At the time when he painted this work he was in a graver mood than usual, for he had come fresh from parting with Baccio della Porta, the friend who in spite of his different tastes was more than a brother to him, and who had renounced the world in despair at the death of Savonarola. This may account for the inscription which Albertinelli left on his fresco at the Certosa, and which has more of seriousness than we might have expected from him. It is as follows :—"Mariotti Florentini opus, pro quo, patres, deus orandus est, A.D. MCCCCVI. Mens. Sept." It was his best time, for he had just painted his well-known "Visitation" and completed the "Last Judgment" in the cloisters of S. Maria Nuova, which Baccio had left undone, and in this fresco of the Certosa the kneeling Magdalen at the foot of the Cross, and Angels receiving the blood which drops from the wounds of

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Christ, have a Peruginesque grace, rare in his works. Albertinelli's residence at the Convent seems to have been the cause of considerable annoyance to the monks. He had brought with him a band of noisy scholars, who played tricks on the Carthusians, and, dissatisfied with the fare provided for them, stole the monks' suppers and created general confusion, until the brothers, to be rid of their tormentors, agreed to double their rations, if only they would finish the work as speedily as possible, which, accordingly, Vasari says, was "effected with much merriment and many a joyous laugh."

Another artist, whose gentle nature was more congenial to the place, Jacopo di Pontormo, the best of Andrea del Sarto's pupils, spent many months at the Certosa, where he adorned the Great Cloister with a whole series of scenes from the life of Christ. Poor Pontormo! it was his precocious genius that made Michael Angelo say, "If this boy lives to grow up, he will surpass us all." But, alas! for youthful promise, his after-career failed utterly to fulfil this prophecy. Not content with the portraits which he could paint in so masterly a manner, he was seized with an unlucky wish to emulate the Sistina, and threw away years of his life in an attempt to cover the interior of St. Lorenzo with gigantic frescoes, destined to be the wonder of the world. The results proved

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miserably inadequate to the grandeur of the design, and before the work was completed the artist died, worn out by his exertions and heart-broken at the failure of his attempts. All through his life he suffered from this ambition to imitate the work of greater men; and Vasari says that the frescoes he painted at the Certosa were spoilt by an ineffectual attempt to follow the manner of Albert Dürer. Of this it is impossible to judge, for only the merest fragment of these works are now left. A graceful head or two, a bit of Andrea-like colouring here and there are all that remain to recall the memory of a painter worthy of a better fate.

Time has proved less destructive to the sculptor's art, and besides the tombs of the Acciaiuoli, many specimens of Renaissance work are still to be seen at the Certosa. Luca della Robbia has left there some of his Saints and Angels in delicate blue and white, and in the refectory is a pulpit carved with the cross and crown of thorns by that sweetest of all Florentine sculptors, Mino da Fiesole. Donatello is said to have fashioned the tomb of Cardinal Angelo Acciaiuoli, who died in 1409. This monument was enriched with a garland of fruit and flowers by a later master, Giuliano di San Gallo, the favourite architect of Lorenzo de' Medici. In the Chapter-house, under Mariotto's fresco, is another tomb, which must not be passed over, the work of Francesco di San Gallo,

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Giuliano's son. It is that of Leonardo Buonafede, a name which frequently occurs in old Florentine records, and is worthy of all remembrance. Originally a monk of the Certosa, this excellent man was, during twenty-seven years, Spedalingo of the great Florentine hospital, S. Maria Nuova, and made himself beloved by his good works and the many charitable institutions which he founded. At the end of that time he became Bishop of Cortona, and when, in 1545, he died at a great age, wished to be buried in his old convent. His portrait, with a view of the Certosa in the background, is introduced in an altarpiece by Ridolfo Ghirlandajo, now in the Academy. It is curious to find that this saintly prelate, while Spedalingo of S. Maria Nuova, was called upon to baptize the infant daughter of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, the famous Catherine, afterwards Queen of France.

Francesco di San Gallo was an inferior artist to his father, and has left little work of importance behind him ; but in the good Bishop's tomb, it must be owned, he has succeeded in producing a masterpiece. There is no aiming at effect, no especial richness of decoration, or beauty of workmanship ; but the sculptor has caught the expression which lingers on the faces of the dead, and rendered it with touching simplicity. The old man lies on his death-bed :

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he has breathed his parting sigh, and his eyes have closed in their last slumber ; but a happy smile still plays on his features, the brightness of the long life spent in doing good shining on his countenance. The mere sight of his face is enough to take away all terror from the thought of death. It is all so easy and natural, just as if he had laid down to rest, a little tired with his long journey, and in that sleep had found all his soul desired.

“ He was ninety-five years old when he died,” said the monk who stood with me by the tomb, and then turned away, as if this explained everything.

Of about the same date as Buonafede's tomb is the stained glass in one of the cloisters representing scenes from the life of St. Bruno, and ascribed to Giovanni da Udine, the friend of Raphael, who spent some years at Florence, and designed the windows of the Laurentian Library, before returning to die at Rome and be laid by the side of Raphael, “ never again to be divided from him whom living he had refused to leave ” (*Vasari*). St. Bruno's history appears again in a number of frescoes executed by Bernardino Poccetti, that prolific artist whose works in Florentine churches and convents have rendered him, in the eyes of modern travellers, a type of the decadence of Italian painting.

More interesting are the series of busts by Gio-

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vanni della Robbia, who, in 1522, was commissioned by the Carthusians to adorn their cloisters with medallions representing Prophets, Evangelists, Saints, and Martyrs. These curious heads, executed in classical style and in a great variety of colours, were removed in the last century to the court of the Accademia, and have only recently been restored to their original place in the loggia of the large cloister. Twenty of the series seem to be by Giovanni's own hand, and are full of vigour and character. The other forty-seven are evidently the work of assistants and followers, but are not without a certain interest. Moses and David appear in turbans and Oriental robes, Judas Maccabeus as a knight in armour, St. James wears the pilgrim's cockle-shell, and S. Mary Magdalen is conspicuous by her noble Greek profile. The four Evangelists—evidently executed by Giovanni himself—occupy the angles of the cloister, and a lunette in white and blue terra-cotta, representing S. Lorenzo surrounded by Angels, is to be seen in the small cloister.

Thus, the Certosa continued to exercise a noble and liberal patronage of art until the monastery was seized and suppressed by the French, on the invasion of Napoleon. Many priceless treasures perished then, and the collections which had been formed with so much love and care were scattered by ruthless hands.

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One victim of persecution and outrage, the aged pontiff, Pius VI, found a shelter within her hospitable walls, and the rooms where he resided, until he was dragged to die in France, are still shown.

In 1814 the convent was restored to the monks ; and when later, Acts were passed for the dissolution of monasteries, the Certosa was one of the few foundations which were spared for the sake of their great memories. We can pass under the gateway now, through which of old no monk might issue and no woman enter, without the Archbishop's permission ; and, climbing up the steep hillside, cross the threshold above which Niccolò's lion still lifts its fleur-de-lys. A strange loneliness fills the spacious courts, and the wind blows cold up the empty corridors. Here and there we meet a white-robed brother, lighting the lamps in the church, pacing up and down the cloisters, or taking an evening walk among the dark shadows of the cypress avenues. From all we receive the same courteous welcome. They lead us through their halls and cloisters, and show us the beauties of their ancient home—the great central church, with its rich mosaic pavement and cluster of surrounding chapels, the crypt where the ashes of their founder rest, the *Spezeria*, fragrant with the scent of the perfumes they manufacture. Their dress, their rule are still the same ; they are almost the only things that

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have not changed in these five hundred years. Without the world goes on, the fashion of its order changes, but in the life of these monks the lapse of ages has worked little alteration. Every day brings back the same round of services, every night they rise at stated hours from their beds of sackcloth to repeat the same nocturnal offices. One generation is laid in the Campo Santo, and another takes its place without a break in the monotony of their existence. Only their ranks are sadly thinned, and the few who remain appear conscious that their days are numbered. There is a melancholy pride in their voices as they guide the stranger through the deserted courts, and pause to compare their past greatness with their present condition.

“Once we were a hundred and more, now we are only twenty. *Chi sa?* Who knows how long we shall be suffered to remain here at all? Who can tell how soon another decree may not drive us out to wander homeless exiles over the face of the earth, and turn our beloved convent into a barrack or factory? God knows! these are evil days! blessed be His will!”

And so, meanwhile, they linger on, isolated fragments of a system that belongs to the past, but worthy of our reverence as the last relics of an age which could produce foundations as vast and splendid as this Certosa and men as noble as Niccolò Acciaiuoli.



## A TOMB AT RAVENNA

"Morte bella pareva nel suo bel viso."—PETRARCH.

RAVENNA belongs—more than any other Italian city—to the early ages, when the Christian Church was in her first vigour and the Roman Empire was tottering to its fall. Her great churches and noble tombs had their origin in that troubled period when the old order was slowly giving place to the new, and the human race was entering on a fresh phase in its career. The mosaic pictures of Galla Placidia's shrine, the portraits of Justinian and Theodora in the apse of San Vitale, the long procession of virgins and martyrs in the nave of S. Apollinare, and the sculptures of the ancient sarcophagi that meet us at every turn, all tell the same story. The enthusiasm of apostolic days breathes in the types and symbols that we see carved in stone or set forth in the jewelled tints of mosaic—the Cross of salvation and peacock of the resurrection, the Good Shepherd leading his flock to rest in the green pastures, the hart no longer panting after, but at length tasting, the water-brooks. These things make Ravenna unique among the cities of Italy.

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But although her great days ended with the fall of the Exarchs and the Lombard conquest, Ravenna once more enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity under the rule of the House of Polenta in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the once imperial city still retains many memorials of mediæval times. The palace where Guido da Polenta received Dante during his exile has vanished, but the church of S. Francesco, which was the favourite sanctuary and burial-place of his family, is still standing. Here Dante himself was laid to rest, by his last prayer, clad in the habit of the Franciscan Order; and here, close under the walls of this ancient Christian basilica, stands the monument raised to his memory by the Venetian governor Bembo, and the "little cupola, more neat than solemn," which now protects his tomb. Beyond the gates of the city is the Pineta where the poet loved to wander, that vast forest, so full of memories, which still stretches its vivid green between the blue of sky and sea. We can see the spectre-huntsman of Boccaccio's time, that "Nastagio degli Onesti," whose tragic tale was painted by Botticelli, and sung by Dryden and Byron in turn, driving his hell-hounds through the long avenues. We think of the hapless Francesca riding along these grassy glades in the May morning, by her "bel Paolo's" side, on the way to Rimini. And we repeat the familiar lines in which Dante likens the murmurs

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of "the divine forest" in Paradise to the rustling of the wind and the joyous singing of the birds in the pine-trees on the shore of Classis.

But the tomb which forms the subject of our illustration belongs to a later age. The old Franciscan church, round which the proudest memories of mediæval Ravenna cluster, once held another sepulchral monument, which has lately been removed to the neighbouring museum known as the Accademia di belle Arti. It is the effigy of Guidarello Guidarelli, a soldier of renown in his day, and was the work of a great sculptor, Tullio Lombardo. Of Guidarello himself we know little, but both his valiant deeds and the mysterious and tragic fate which ended his career in the flower of his manhood are typical of the age in which he lived, while the statue which the Venetian master carved in his honour is of surpassing beauty.

The family from which our hero sprang originally came from Florence, and settled in Ravenna early in the fifteenth century. Here they soon acquired wealth and renown. Their palace stood near the Duomo, in the old street now called the Via Guidarello, and they owned considerable property in land and houses in the neighbourhood. Francesco Guidarelli held several important posts under Government, and was sent on one occasion as ambassador to Venice. When, in December 1468, the Emperor Frederic III visited Ravenna, Francesco's son, Guidarello, was one

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of eighteen noble youths who received the honour of knighthood at the hands of their imperial master. Soon after this the young knight married Benedetta del Sale, a daughter of one of the oldest and proudest families of Ravenna, which the chronicler Fiandrini describes as "il nobilissimo casato del Sale."

At this time Ravenna had already lost her independence. The last of her Polenta rulers had been deprived of his principality by the Signory of Venice, and sent to die in exile in the isle of Candia. The twin columns still standing in the Forum remind us that during seventy years Ravenna was numbered among the subject-lands of Venice, although the winged lion which formerly crowned one of these pillars has been replaced by a statue of San Vitale. Guidarello, however, proved himself a loyal servant of the Republic, and the fidelity which he showed to the Venetian Podestà of Ravenna was probably the cause of his early death. His first laurels were earned in the service of the Republic, and he soon rose to considerable renown as a wise and valiant captain. Contemporary writers describe him as being not only a brave soldier, but a cultivated scholar, learned in the Greek and Latin tongues, and the poets who lamented his premature end spoke of him as dear alike to Minerva and Bellona—a Mars in war and a Cato in peace.

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Unfortunately we know little of Guidarello's early life, and the few details of his exploits which have been preserved all relate to his last years. In April 1498 he sold land to the value of thirty-five florins, and raised a troop of horse, at the head of which he set out for Tuscany to join the Venetian army under Duke Guidobaldo of Urbino. Marino Sanudo, whose Diaries afford us so much valuable information concerning this period, mentions Guidarello repeatedly in his chronicle of passing events. From him we learn that this knight of Ravenna was among the chief captains of the forces in Val d'Arno who met in the camp during the last week of September to decide on the measures necessary for reducing the fortress of Marati, then held by the Florentines. On this occasion Duke Guidobaldo himself was present, as well as Piero and Giuliano dei Medici, the sons of Lorenzo, who had recently been expelled from Florence by the partisans of Savonarola, and were now fighting in the enemy's ranks against their native city. "And here, too," writes Sanudo, "were present Signor Bartolommeo d'Alviano, Paolo Manfron, my lord Annibale Bentivoglio of Bologna, and one Guidarello of Ravenna."<sup>1</sup>

On January 20, 1499, the same chronicler

<sup>1</sup> *Marino Sanudo Diarii*, ii. 8.

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mentions the arrival in camp of a Florentine refugee, who was a friend of Guidarello and who brought news of importance concerning the state of parties in Florence and the confusion that reigned in the city. Soon after this the Venetians abandoned the campaign, disgusted with the lack of support which they received from their allies, Lodovico Sforza and the Emperor Maximilian, and turned their arms against the treacherous Duke of Milan and his niece, Caterina Sforza, "that tiger," as Sanudo calls this heroic lady. The next we hear of Guidarello is in the following August, when the French invaders were already at the gates of Milan, and the armies of Cæsar Borgia were fast closing round the Rocca held by the brave Madonna of Forlì. Then, we read in Sanudo's records, there came one day to Venice "Domine Guidarello da Ravenna, who was in the people's pay,"<sup>1</sup> but who openly expressed his dislike of foreign service, and wished the Signory would undertake the expedition which the Pope's son was leading against the cities of Imola and Forlì.

During Cæsar Borgia's second invasion of Romagna in the autumn of 1500, Guidarello again proved his loyalty to the Doge and Signory by supplying Antonio Soranzo, the Venetian Governor of Ravenna,

<sup>1</sup> *Marino Sanudo Diarii*, ii. 1082.

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with constant information regarding the progress of the conqueror. In October he wrote from the camp before Faenza, giving the Podestà full particulars of the situation. Duke Valentino's triumphant campaign had just received an unexpected check before the walls of this little city, which its young prince, Astorre Manfredi, and his gallant subjects vowed to defend with the last drop of their blood. The eyes of all Italy were upon the brave little town, which alone among the cities of Romagna dared to offer a determined resistance to the arms of the dreaded Borgia.

"I rejoice," wrote Isabella d'Este to her husband, the Marquis of Mantua, "I rejoice to hear that the citizens of Faenza are so loyal and constant in their lord's cause, and feel that they have saved the honour of Italy. May God give them grace to persevere! Not that I wish Duke Valentino any ill, but because neither the poor Signor nor his faithful people deserve so hard a fate."

In his despatches to Ravenna, Guidarello informed Soranzo of the desperate efforts which Duke Valentino was making to obtain possession of Faenza by intrigue or force of arms, and of the steadfast opposition which he had encountered. On November 7 he wrote again from Forlì, telling him of the arrival of Cæsar and his chief captains, the three Orsini brothers, Vitellozzo

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Vitelli, Annibale Bentivoglio, and Paolo Baglioni. At the same time he gave a full and accurate description of the troops and ammunition at Borgia's disposal, adding the following significant note: "This army is very mediocre in quality and especially poor in foot-soldiers, but Fortune does everything, lays the siege, places the ladders against the walls, gives the battle, and finally carries cities."<sup>1</sup> Such was the unconscious homage which the warrior of Ravenna paid to Borgia's imposing personality and extraordinary force of will. "The Pope's son," wrote a Ferrarese envoy from Rome, "has a great soul and is bent on attaining fame and power, but cares more to conquer cities than to govern and preserve them." For a while, however, even Cæsar's boundless ambition and untiring energy were foiled by the courage and loyalty of Astorre's subjects. Guidarello describes the gallant sorties made by the little garrison, and tells how, one winter morning, he himself rode up to the city gates with twenty crossbowmen. No one came out to meet him, but the walls bristled with men and artillery, which discharged their shells repeatedly and compelled him to retire. Still Duke Valentino, contrary to the opinion of his captains, was in favour of an immediate assault, and with this intention held a grand review of his forces, including a large body of newly levied

<sup>1</sup> *Marino Sanudo Diarii*, iii. 1050.



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infantry. But the increasing severity of the winter forced him to abandon the siege, and on November 23 he broke up his camp and left Forlì abruptly. "The Duke's camp has been suddenly raised," joyfully wrote Astorre Manfredi to the Signory of Venice, "owing to the bad weather, and Faenza is saved as it were by a divine miracle."<sup>1</sup>

The besieging army was disbanded and ordered into winter quarters. Cæsar himself went to Cesena, Paolo Orsini to Imola, and the remaining leaders and men-at-arms were sent to Rimini, Pesaro, and Fano in order to relieve Forlì. "Guidarello Guidarelli," writes the Podestà of Ravenna, "has been appointed chief of the lodgings, and superintended the disposal of the forces in their separate quarters."<sup>2</sup> That he made some attempt to maintain order and protect the defenceless citizens from the depredations of the soldiery is evident from the decree which he issued at Forlì, in which it is expressly stated that the garrison is only to be provided with fuel and lodging by the inhabitants. But this was no easy task, for Borgia's lawless troops were the terror of the whole district. They seized cattle and corn, plundered houses, and put to the sword owners who dared to resist their greed and insolence. Again and again in Sanudo's pages we find reports of their violence and

<sup>1</sup> *Marino Sanudo Diarii*, iii. 1125.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 1241.

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rapacity, and of the Duke's refusal to hear the prayers of the unhappy peasants who came to him for redress. From Pesaro, from Rimini and Forlì, from all parts of the distracted land we hear the same cry. "The Duke's soldiers have no money, and do all manner of damage wherever they lodge. These men are given over to the devil and to his work, and the Duke listens to no complaint and does no justice."<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Cæsar himself was spending his brief interval of leisure in feasting and dancing, and in his favourite pastime of patrolling the streets at the head of a troop of masked men-at-arms. In January he was still at Cesena, "giving himself to pleasure, and taking an active part in hunting expeditions and masquerades." In February he rose up suddenly like a lion from his lair and stormed the Rocca of Ressi, and took and sacked the prosperous little town of Solarolo near Faenza. Early in March he was back at Imola. There he summoned his chief captains together and held a council of war to decide the fate of Faenza. There were two parties in the camp, Soranzo heard from his trusted knight at Imola. Some of the leaders were in favour of an immediate assault, but the more prudent advised delay until the expected French reinforcements had arrived. "And on Sunday, March 7, they held a *festà* and danced all night,

<sup>1</sup> *Marino Sanudo Diarii*, iii. 1064.

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and the Duke danced." Three weeks later letters from Ravenna informed the Signory that Duke Valentino was still at Imola, "taking his pleasures and enjoying himself after his wonted fashion, in the old way."<sup>1</sup> Now and then darker rumours reach our ears. A fair Venetian lady, the wife of the captain of infantry at Cervia, was suddenly carried off to the Rocca of Forlì one night by a Spanish officer acting under the Duke's orders. The injured husband appealed to the Doge for redress, and appeared in the College "very melancholy and almost in tears" to beg for help. Nothing had been heard of his wife for a fortnight, and the most sinister reports were abroad. Great was the indignation aroused on all sides, and many the letters that were exchanged on the subject between Ambassadors at Venice and Rome. The Pope himself pronounced the act to be "infamous" and pressed his son for explanations, while he publicly maintained the Duke's innocence. But Cæsar kept silence and the matter was allowed to drop. Only it served to increase the hatred of the people throughout Romagna for their oppressor. "Cesena, Forlì, and Imola," we learn, "bitterly resent the wrong that has been done, and impatiently await the Duke's ruin."<sup>2</sup> The star of the Borgia, however, was still

<sup>1</sup> *Marino Sanudo Diarii*, iii. 1616.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 1530.

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in the ascendant. All through these months of apparent idleness Cæsar was collecting money and troops, and early in April he once more took the field at the head of a large army supplied with fresh guns and ammunition. This time the doom of Faenza was sealed. On the last day of April the exhausted garrison surrendered, and its brave leader, Astorre Manfredi, was taken prisoner to Rome and strangled by Cæsar's orders in Castell' Sant' Angelo. But we hear no more of Guidarello. He was not present at the last siege of Faenza, and no further letters from his hand reached the Podestà of Ravenna. A dark mystery overshadows the hero's fate. All we know is that he was murdered one night at Imola by an assassin's hand, and fell a victim to some foul conspiracy. This we learn from an elegy composed by a Venetian poet, Bernardino Catti, and published in the following year. "Here," sings the bard, "lies the good knight Guidarello, the glory of warlike Mars and the boast of learned Minerva. Imola, with secret steel, took the life which Ravenna gave to be the pride of Italy." And in another poem we read: "Once Guidarello was the flower of Italy and of the whole world; born and bred on the ancient soil of Ravenna, he fell at Imola, treacherously murdered by the hand of a proud Roman." Dr. Corrado Ricci, the

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able and learned director of the Uffizi, who has devoted much time and study to the antiquities of Ravenna, is of opinion that Paolo Orsini was the assassin by whose hand Guidarello died.<sup>1</sup> But there can be little doubt that Duke Valentino instigated the crime if he did not actually strike the blow. Up to the close of 1500, the knight of Ravenna, it is plain, had enjoyed Cæsar's confidence and held a high post in his councils. But Guidarello's secret correspondence with the Signory of Venice may well have excited his suspicions, and Valentino was said by those who knew him best never to forgive a wrong, and never to allow an enemy to live. His vengeance was apt to be swift and sudden, and eighteen months later the same fate befell Guidarello's most distinguished colleagues, Paolo Orsini, Vitellozzo, Gravina and Oliverotto da Fermo, who were treacherously seized and put to death by the Duke's orders—an act described in a famous phrase of the Machiavelli as "il bellissimo inganno di Sinigaglia" (the magnificent deceit of Sinigaglia).

So the good knight Guidarello came to his end, and Ravenna wept bitterly over "the flower which had been plucked before its time," and lamented her warrior's untimely end. His body was brought home to his native city, and buried in the church

<sup>1</sup> *Italia Artistica: Ravenna*, p. 83. *La Statua di Guidarello*, p. 21.

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of S. Francesco, a sanctuary for which he cherished especial devotion. By his will, he left a sum of six hundred ducats for the decoration of the chapel and altar of Archbishop Liberius, whose ashes rest in this ancient basilica. But these last wishes were never obeyed, and after the death of his widow, twenty years later, the Franciscan friars obtained the Pope's leave to divert to their own uses the money which he had bequeathed.

Meanwhile Guidarello's remains were laid in an early Christian sarcophagus, and by his wife's pious care the tomb was enriched with his armorial bearings and adorned with an effigy of the dead knight in armour. Some Ravennese writers have described this statue as the work of a local sculptor, but there seems no reason to dispute the old tradition which assigns it to the Venetian, Tullio Lombardi. Not only does the marble bear a close relation to this gifted sculptor's other works in Padua and Venice, but the tradition is confirmed by a contemporary chronicle—preserved in the library of S. Apollinare di Classe—where the writer expressly states that this admirable statue was the work of Pietro Lombardi's son. The artists of this family, to whom we owe the finest Renaissance sculpture in Venice, were often employed in Ravenna. Pietro himself executed the bas-reliefs on the columns



*Photo: Alinari, Florence*

TOMB OF GUIDARELLO GUIDARELLI

(Ravenna)





## A TOMB AT RAVENNA

in the Forum and the delicate ornament of the pillars which support the chapel of the crucifix in S. Francesco. His son Tullio, there can be little doubt, was the sculptor chosen by Benedetta to carve the effigy of her dead lord. Unfortunately his statue was not long allowed to remain in its place. After the death of Benedetta in 1520, this tomb, which may still be seen on the left of the door in S. Francesco, became the property of her kinsman, Bartolommeo del Sale, who substituted his own armorial bearings for those of Guidarello on the sarcophagus and removed the warrior's effigy to the chapel without the walls, known as the Capella Braccioforte. The name of Braccioforte, however, does not, as we read in some modern guide-books, owe its derivation to Guidarello's strong arm, but to a miracle wrought in early Christian times, according to a legend recorded by Agnellus in the ninth century. Here Tullio Lombardi's statue remained for the next two hundred years with a Latin epitaph, commemorating the splendour of the hero's acts and the glory of his name, inscribed on the wall above. At length, some thirty or forty years ago, the statue was removed to the Accademia, where it still remains, the one supremely beautiful thing there.

Throughout the greater part of the fifteenth

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century the Christian traditions of mediæval ages still influenced the form of sepulchral monuments, and found expression in the statues of angels watching by the dead man's bier, and in the bas-reliefs of the Annunciation and the Resurrection that were carved on altar-tombs. But by the close of the century a change of style became evident, and the increasing realism of the age made itself felt in this branch of monumental art. To represent the dead as nearly as possible as they appeared in their last sleep, clad in the robes or armour in which they were carried to their burial, became the sculptor's aim, the object upon which his highest skill was lavished. Then Lodovico Sforza, in his grief and remorse at his wife's death, bade Il Gobbo carve the fair face and form of the young duchess wearing the rich brocades and jewels in which she had been borne to her last resting-place. Then Amadeo's skilful hand designed the marble effigy of the dead girl Medea, in the Colleoni Chapel at Bergamo, with the short locks curling over her innocent brow, and the string of pearls at her throat. Then, too, Agostino Busti represented the youthful victor of Ravenna, Gaston de Foix, lying on a mortuary couch in full armour, clasping his sword to his heart, as he died on the battlefield which he had won for France.

The same spirit moved the Venetian sculptor when



HEAD OF WARRIOR  
(Ravenna)

*Photo: Alinari, Florence*



## A TOMB AT RAVENNA

he carved this figure of Guidarello in his last sleep. He may have been present when the warrior's corpse was brought home from Imola amid the lamentations of the people and the tears of Benedetta. This at least is the impression that we receive from his work. The good knight lies on a richly draped bier, clad in a complete suit of armour, with his helmet on his brow and the collar of knighthood on his neck. The coat of mail is adorned with lion heads, and his hands, in their steel gauntlets, are folded over the long sword which reaches down to his feet. Only the vizor of his helmet is raised, and the dead warrior's face is exposed to sight, as if it were but yesterday that the fatal blow had fallen and put an end to his life. The head has dropped a little on one side; the eyes are closed, and the lips parted with an expression of momentary pain, as if the bitterness of death had not quite passed away. "I have never seen so marvellous a work of art!" exclaimed the historian of Florence, Gino Capponi, when he stood before this tomb at Ravenna. "The expression of the face gives the effect of a violent end with a truth and reality that are sublime beyond words. It is the very life of death."<sup>1</sup> And so much did the Florentine patriot admire Tullio's statue, that he kept a cast of Guidarello's head in his study to his dying day.

<sup>1</sup> Marco Tabbarini, *Gino Capponi*, p. 233.

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Capponi's words express what we all feel when we look on this masterpiece of Renaissance sculpture. Were it not for this effigy, Guidarello's name would be unknown to-day, and his great deeds would have been forgotten long ago. Even Sanudo's chronicles and the Venetian poet's elegies could hardly have saved the hero's fame from oblivion. But the love of Benedetta and the skill of Lombardi's chisel have combined to keep his memory green, and to make his name immortal.

"Tout passe. L'art robuste  
Seul a l'éternité. Le buste  
Survit à la cité."

## A VISIT TO LA VERNIA

1884

“Salve Mons felix Sinai felicior illo  
Scripsit ubi Moysi jura sacrata Deus,  
Te super apparens Crucifixus tua refulsit  
Francisco oranti Stigmata sacra dedit.”

FRA LUCIDO.

AREZZO is one of those Tuscan cities which is the most easy of access, and the most seldom visited by ordinary travellers. The very fact that it is only three hours by train from Florence, and lies on the main line to Rome, rather tends to produce this result. Yet Arezzo offers many attractions both to the student of art and history, and those who can devote a few days to the study of its antiquities will find the time well spent.

In the first place, Arezzo is a bright and pleasant town, prettily situated on a sloping hill, which rises gently from the Val Chiana, and surrounded by loftier mountains. It is famous for the lightness and salubrity of its air, which, as long ago as Giovanni Villani's days, was popularly supposed to impart a certain delicacy and refinement of intellect—in the words of Michael Angelo, “*sottilità*”—to its natives.

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“Dear Giorgio,” the great man would say to Vasari, himself an Aretine by birth, “if my mind is worth anything, I owe it to the fine air of your Arezzo country.” And, indeed, the roll of illustrious Aretines of all ages is a long one. In those ancient days when Arretium formed one of the twelve cities of the Etruscan confederation, it was the home of the powerful Cilnii family, from which Mâecenas descended. In mediæval times the poet Petrarch, Guittone, the inventor of the sonnet ; the artists, Margaritone and Spinello ; Guido, the improver of the musical system ; Pietro Aretino, the satirist, and many others, equally well known, first saw the light within the walls of Arezzo.

The Aretines have shown a praiseworthy reverence for their great men from the time when they invited Petrarch to visit the house where he was born, during his father’s exile from Florence, and which had been preserved with religious care by the public magistrates. The notes of the musical scale with which the name of the Benedictine monk, Guido, is for ever linked, are still to be seen painted outside the house, which was once his home ; and the number of commemorative tablets on the walls has given rise to the common saying, that the stones still speak in Arezzo.

From Etruscan days the coral-red jars manufactured at Arretium were held in high esteem, and have been celebrated both by Martial and Pliny. Speci-



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mens of this pottery may still be seen at the Museum, and since the bronzes discovered here have been moved to Florence, these, with a few ancient inscriptions, are the only traces left of Etruscan and Roman remains. But in treasures of thirteenth and fourteenth century art Arezzo is rich. It has a noble Duomo, one of the earliest and most interesting examples of Italian Gothic architecture, bearing a close resemblance to S. Maria Novella of Florence, and containing, among other choice sculpture, the famous tomb on which the battles and sieges of the warrior bishop Tarlati are represented. In another quarter of the town, on the picturesque old market-place, is the ancient shrine of S. Maria della Pieve, whose fantastic front of twisted columns and arcaded apse have won a new claim on the interest of this generation as the "pillared church," of Pompilia's soldier-saint, Giuseppe Caponsacchi, Canon of the Pieve. Lastly, we have in S. Francesco a storehouse of the noblest mediæval art from the chapel where Spinello's archangel flashes down upon us with his drawn sword, to the choir where we find the wonderful series of frescoes by the hand of a painter who amazes us by his mastery of form and effect, while he fascinates us by the deep poetry and spiritual force of his conceptions. If Arezzo contained nothing but these scenes from the legend of the True Cross by Piero della Francesca, it would be well worthy of a visit. When we have

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seen all this we can go beyond the walls and explore the tract of country known as the Casentino or valley of the Upper Arno. A fiercely contested battleground it was in Dante's time, when Arezzo was the great stronghold of the Ghibelline party, who from its walls waged war on the Guelfs of Florence, and this fair Aretine territory was laid waste by repeated invasions of the foe.

It is hard to recall that warlike age in our own days when the Casentino was a rich and smiling district, fair at all times, but most of all in the early autumn when purple figs and scarlet pomegranates—*pomi d'oro*—hang in clusters from the trees, and acacias and vines are touched with their first tints of gold. The vintage had already begun on the warm September day when we left the gates of Arezzo and drove up Val d'Arno to visit the renowned mountain sanctuary of La Vernia. The vineyards on either side of the road were alive with bright groups of peasants gathering the first ripe grapes, and piling up the large wicker baskets into waggons harnessed with white oxen who stood lazily by, shaking their heads now and then to drive away the flies with the crimson tassels which hung over their foreheads.

For three hours we followed the course of the Arno, which, "not content with its hundred miles race," here begins those interminable windings through the midst of this fair Tuscan land which Dante, in

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his bitter invective against the dwellers on its banks, describes as peopled alternately with curs, wolves, and foxes ; in other words, Aretines, Florentines, and Pisans.

In the Casentino it is still a clear mountain stream, flowing quietly along its rocky bed, spanned here and there by bridges with raised arches telling of winter seasons when the now slumbering waters reach a perilous height.

As we proceed onward up the hill towards Bibbiena in the Casentino, we are reminded at every step of Dante's minute description of these scenes which he knew so well. From the green slopes on either side descend those glittering rills, the cool waters for which the forger Adam of Brescia thirsted in the flames of hell. To our left is the mountain of the Pratomagno dividing the Casentino from the lower valley of Arno ; to the right that " great yoke of Apennine," which forms the water-shed of Tuscany and Umbria, and separates the streams which flow into the Arno from those which join the Tiber. Before we began the last steep ascent into Bibbiena our *vetturino*, pointing with his whip to a lofty fir-clad crest towering high above a desolate ridge of bare cliffs, cried out " Ecco La Vernia ! " There, before our eyes, was the mountain where the strange monk of old sought out a solitude far removed from the haunts of men. La Vernia, whose barren rocks and pine forests have been

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painted by Giotto and Angelico, and a hundred other artists, for the sake of Francis, La Vernia of which Dante sang in the highest spheres of Paradise.

“ Nel crudo sasso intra Tevere ed Arno  
Da Cristo prese l'ultimo sigillo  
Che le sue membra du' anni portarno.”

Bibbiena itself, where we spent the night before undertaking the steep ascent of Monte Alvernia, is a flourishing little town in the heart of the Casentino, standing in the midst of cornfields and chestnut woods. Brown-faced children and dark-eyed maidens, with smooth, long tresses and broad straw hats, looked curiously at us from the door-steps as we passed, and every roof and window of the quaint old wooden houses was gay with heaps of orange-coloured maize spread out to dry in the sun.

The walls of Bibbiena were razed by the Florentines in their anger with the inhabitants who received the exiled Medici on their expulsion in 1509, but its chief claim on public notice rests on the celebrity attained by one of its natives, Bernardo Dovizi, better known as Cardinal Bibbiena, the Secretary of Leo X, and the friend and patron of Raphael. It is to the credit of the worldly prelate and author of the *Calandra* that in his busy Roman life, amidst all the honours which the Pope showered upon him, he did not forget his birthplace, but erected the church of S. Lorenzo

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there, and decorated its altars with some fine terracottas from the *atelier* of the Della Robbias. One of these is a Pietà surrounded with lovely angels and saints, the other a Nativity. Both are encircled in a wreath of cherub heads, vine-leaves, and clusters of fruit, all exquisitely carved, and delicately coloured. The heartrending expression of grief on the Virgin's face in the former, and the startled expression of the shepherds as the heavenly vision breaks upon their eyes, have much in common with the masterpieces of Andrea della Robbia at La Vernia, and were probably the work of the same master.

It was in the plains below the old ramparts of Bibbiena that the great fight of Campaldino took place on the 11th of June 1289 between the Ghibelines of Arezzo and the Florentine Guelfs. Dante himself, then a young man of four-and-twenty, fought in the thick of the battle in the ranks of the cavalry, and in a letter quoted by Leonardo Aretino, he describes how, after narrowly escaping defeat, his own side won the day, and completely routed the Aretines, whose warlike Bishop, Ubertini, was slain in the engagement. In the fifth canto of the Purgatory, he puts the tale of that fatal evening into the mouth of one of the unhappy fugitives who died of his wounds in the flight, and whose corpse was whirled along the waters of the Archiano, a stream which falls into the

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Arno just below Bibbiena. The description of the clouds gathering over the mountains towards dusk and falling in torrents of rain on the battlefield heaped with dead and dying, is given with all the vividness of an eye-witness. To-day all is still in those fair regions. The ashes of Guelf and Ghibelline warriors have fed the golden corn that waves on the fertile plain, and the peaceful music of the "Angelus" rings along the green hillside which once echoed to the noise of clashing steel and the confused shouts of struggling horsemen. We looked across the valley at the towers of Poppi rising on the opposite hill in the calm glow of the evening sunlight, and listened to the bells of the Bibbiena churches behind us until the tale of that hard-won fight which Dante had made real to us seemed to fade away again into the dimness of past ages, and we forgot that the wooded slopes below us had ever been the scene of strife and bloodshed.

Early the next morning we started for La Vernia through fields of tall maize and woods laden with those chestnuts for which Bibbiena was famous as long ago as Burchiello's days. Skirting the banks of the Corsalone torrent we passed through a forest where ilex and holly and here and there fig-trees and laurels mingled with the shady chestnut-trees until we crossed the stream, and the more arduous part of the ascent began. These remote scenes were not unknown to

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English travellers of past generations, and if on the further side of Arno

“Vallombrosa remotely remembers

The foot which she knew when her leaves were September's,”

these forest shades recall the home-sick lay of the exiled Jacobite who

“Heard on La Vernia Scargill's whispering trees,  
And pined by Arno for my lovelier Tees.”

But as we climb the rugged mountain-side and seek out a path among rocks overgrown with moss and brambles, we leave other memories behind for those of Francis. Every step is hallowed by the remembrance of his presence in these parts, and our peasant guides could point out the oaks which mark the place where he rested and the spring from which he drank, as well as the monks themselves. The very birds clapped their wings with joy at his coming, they told us, quoting almost the words of the “Fioretti”—“our brothers and sisters sang out to bid him welcome.” As we ascended higher, the road became steeper and the rocks more barren, until we reached the grass meadows at the base of the perpendicular cliffs at the top of which the convent stands. A little further on at a spot known as La Beccia, or the Fountain of St. Francis, is a small hostelry built by the municipality of Florence for the reception of women-pilgrims, and

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from this point a rough path cut in the rock leads to the convent gates.

The story of the foundation of the sanctuary in this secluded and inaccessible region can only be briefly told here, but is given in all its picturesque details by the Saint's biographers.

When Francis was passing by the castle of Montefeltro on one of his journeys his attention was attracted by the sound of music and festivities proceeding from its walls. Hearing that these rejoicings were kept to celebrate the investiture of a member of the family with knighthood, he entered the court of the castle, and preached to the assembled guests with such fervour, that the whole company listened entranced at his eloquence. Among the guests was a certain Orlando, Count of Chiusi, or Clusentinum, a citadel in the neighbourhood of Monte Alvernia, whence the name of Casentino is derived. This wealthy Tuscan noble desired to converse with Francis, and deeply moved by his zeal and devotion, offered him a wild and barren mountain which he owned in Tuscany as especially fitted by its seclusion for a place of retreat and contemplation.

Francis accepted the gift gratefully, and finding the lonely heights of La Vernia "devout and apt for prayer," spent many weeks in a rude hut, which Orlando, who had climbed the hill to welcome him



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with a train of armed servants, made for him out of the branches of trees, which they cut down with their swords. When the fame of the Stigmata had made La Vernia sacred, and the three monks who had originally accompanied Francis were daily joined by new brethren who came in ever increasing numbers, it was found necessary to erect a more substantial building, and twenty-six years after the death of the Patriarch, the convent itself, a solid structure of stone capable of receiving ninety monks, was raised by the alms of the faithful.

The massive walls which, with their narrow loopholes, look like some mediæval fortress crowning the precipitous heights and seem to form part of the rock itself, are said to belong to the original building, but the greater portion of the first convent was destroyed by fire in the fifteenth century, and rebuilt on the same ground by the Florentine Guild of Cloth Merchants. This august company took the convent under its especial protection, and the municipality of Florence have continued to exercise the same beneficent influence on behalf of the present Franciscan community.

Each year the Gonfaloniere or a specially elected deputy visits La Vernia on the 17th of September when the festival of the Stigmata is held, and plants the standard of Florence at the convent gates. It is partly owing to this protection and partly to the

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reverence in which the memory of Francis is held that La Vernia has been one of the few convents spared by the Italian Government. The present community numbers about a hundred Franciscan monks, all usefully and actively engaged. Many are sent out to preach in the neighbouring villages and travel about Umbria and Tuscany teaching the poor peasantry and ministering to their wants in health and sickness. Some are sent to preach Lent and Advent sermons in Florence and other large towns, while of those who remain at home some are engaged in theological studies, and others—the lay portion of the community we may suppose—are employed in the Farmacia and go out as doctors among the poor, or else work as woodcutters, carpenters, blacksmiths and shoemakers, besides performing the necessary labour of the large establishment and attending to the duties of hospitality, no light task at those seasons when pilgrims from all parts flock to La Vernia. In the week of the festival of the Stigmata, which had taken place about a fortnight before our visit, our peasant guides informed us that the number of pilgrims had been as many as two thousand.

A day rarely passes without some pilgrimage of Tuscan or Umbrian peasants visiting the shrine, and the day we arrived we found a party of *contadini*, who had climbed the hill before us, attending mass in the



THE CONVENT OF LA VERNIA



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great convent church. As we entered, two monks were officiating at the high altar, while another played the organ, and from the choir at the easternmost end of the church came the rich, full voices of the Brothers Minor chanting the office.

Immediately service was over, a courteous and intelligent friar advanced to greet us, and finding we could not accept his offer to spend the night at La Vernia, conducted us at once over the convent in company with the peasants who had arrived that morning.

The chief conventual buildings are grouped round a paved courtyard which we enter by a narrow gateway. Near this spot is the chapel of S. Maria degli Angeli, the first church raised on the mountain, and begun in the days of Francis, from whom it received the name of his own beloved Porziuncula at Assisi. The ancient wooden desks at which the monks recited their offices are still to be seen here, and a Della Robbia relief representing the Virgin when she appeared to St. Bonaventura and gave him the measure of the chapel which was built in exact accordance with her directions, and has to this day remained unaltered.

When the community became too numerous to worship in this small chapel, another Count of Chiusi began the great church, which was completed in 1445

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by the Florentine merchants of the Arte della Lana, and is united to S. Maria degli Angeli by a tall bell-tower containing the actual bell from Orlando's Castle of Chiusi. This relic of the original lord of La Vernia was moved here by the special permission of Lorenzo de' Medici, and has been twice recast since it has occupied its present position. Orlando himself became a member of the third order of Francis in the Saint's lifetime, and lies buried in the little church of S. Maria degli Angeli. Many are the noble benefactors who gave their gold to build or adorn a chapel at La Vernia, and whose bones rest in the precincts of the convent.

Among the decorations, which were the gift of Florentine citizens, are several altar-pieces of the Della Robbia school, which is largely represented at La Vernia. Of these, three masterpieces by the hand of Andrea della Robbia are to be seen in the Chiesa Maggiore, the Annunciation, Nativity, and Ascension. The two former, in their delicate blue and white tints, are exquisite specimens of this master who carried the art of Luca's invention to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable.

Never was the spirit of the words *Ecce ancilla Domini* rendered more perfectly than in the lowly maiden kneeling before the angelic messenger who, swift and strong in his youthful beauty, bends on one

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knee to utter his Ave. And surely not even Raphael himself ever painted a sweeter and more life-like image of childhood than that of the radiant Child-Christ, who holds up his fingers to his lips and laughs for joy in his mother's face.

As in the well-known Annunciation on the Hospital of the Innocents in Florence, by Andrea, a tall white lily growing in a pot stands between Gabriel and the Virgin, and a frieze of classic moulding takes the place of the usual wreath of flowers and fruit that frames in the subject.

The monk who was our guide seemed to catch a gleam of inspiration from these terra-cotta pictures, which were so familiar to him, and his bronzed face was lighted up with genuine pleasure as he pointed to the Nativity, and exclaimed: "But see that Child, how natural, how expressive!—the breath alone is wanting." And as we stood before the Ascension, he turned to the heretic Inglesi with a kindly smile: "*Ecco!*" he said; "these are the same for you as for us. They are written for us all in the Bible; there is nothing to separate us here."

He led us out on the broad piazza in front of the church, and after showing us many smaller chapels raised to commemorate different events in the life of Francis, he conducted us through a long covered cloister to the chapel erected on the site of the great

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beech-tree, where the great Saint knelt rapt in prayer when he received the Stigmata. This gallery, which runs along the edge of the cliff looking down on Bibbiena and the valley below, was built two hundred years ago to shelter the monks from the piercing cold of the winter nights during their long vigils. Twice in the twenty-four hours, at midnight and after vespers, they pass in procession through this cloister to the chapel, chanting litanies in honour of the Stigmata. The cloister itself is decorated with curious terra-cotta representations of the Via Crucis, and over the door of the chapel is a beautiful figure of Francis holding the cross in his hand, by one of the Della Robbias.

The chapel, which was begun thirty-seven years after the death of Francis, when the wondrous tale of the Stigmata was fresh in the hearts of his followers, still retains its original features, and a bronze grating in front of the altar marks the exact spot which the reverence of ages has consecrated. Above the altar is another great relief by Andrea della Robbia representing the Crucifixion, and remarkable for the beauty of the weeping angels, who hover in mid-air, clasping their hands together or covering their faces in agonised grief, as well as for the power of expression shown in the different saints assembled at the foot of the Cross. The figure of Francis, who stands



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opposite the Virgin, bears a striking resemblance to the well-known head of S. Giovanni Gualberto in the Vallombrosa altar-piece by Perugino, and shows how near this artist in terra-cotta came to the highest achievements of the best Umbrian masters. In refinement of type and sincerity of devotional emotion, Andrea della Robbia's sorrowing saints yield to none of his contemporaries' creations, while the twenty-three cherub-heads, each different and each instinct with life, set in the frame of the altar-piece, have all the charm and innocent grace which belong to Luca's children.

After showing us many other smaller chapels, our guide led us down rudely cut steps to different caves hidden in the rock, each hallowed by the presence of Francis, or by the memory of some heavenly vision which appeared to him. The peasants and children who accompanied us listened intently to the glowing language in which the monk described each separate incident of the story, and falling on their knees repeated a Pater Noster and Gloria Patri devoutly after him.

Our courteous guide was now summoned away to attend to other duties, but before taking his leave, he led us across the piazza to the guest chamber, where we were hospitably entertained by a lay-brother. We had a companion at dinner in the person of the

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Bibbiena doctor, who had ridden up that morning to see a sick monk, and had brought his little girl with him on her first visit to La Vernia. It was touching to see the delight and amusement with which the monks gathered round the child, asking her name, patting her curly head, and feeding and petting her in the fondest manner. Naturally enough, they seemed to hail gladly any communication with the outer world, and a venerable-looking old brother who had weathered the snows and frosts of more than eighty winters in this desolate abode, amused us by the eagerness with which he asked our friend the doctor, "What news in Bibbiena?" Although so remote a place to us, the little mountain town was evidently to him the centre of life and business.

Later in the day we ascended the highest point of the mountain, a rock called La Penna. Passing under an arched gateway behind the church, and leaving the long low building which contains the friars' cells on our left, we crossed a woodyard, where two brothers were sawing planks of timber, and came out into the *bosco* of fine beech-trees and tall pines, where the birds of old sang to Francis, while Orlando's men-at-arms cut down logs to build his first rude huts. The view from the chapel on the summit is magnificent. On the one side we looked down upon Tuscany, on the other on Umbria and the March of

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Ancona. Far to the east were the lofty mountains of San Marino, and the pale blue hills which surround the Lake of Thrasymene, and stretch from Perugia to Siena, and Radicofani. Looking westward, at our feet lay the rich Casentino vineyards and cornfields, with Poppi and Bibbiena each standing out on their separate hills. On our right we could see the gorge of the Zucca, where the Tiber rises to flow down by Borgo San Sepolcro into the Umbrian plains. To the left, on the other side of the Casentino, was the mountain of the Falterona, and the sources of the Arno. Immediately below, on the southern slope of the mountain stood of old the Castello di Chiusi, renowned not only as the home of Count Orlando, but as the citadel, where Lodovico Buonarroti was Podestà, when in March 1475 his son Michael Angelo was born. Here, at Caprese, "in the close vicinity of the rock of La Vernia, where S. Francis received the sacred wounds of the Stigmata," writes Giorgio Vasari, "under the influence of some fortunate star, the child drew his first breath in our pure Aretine air." Thus these lonely mountain heights won a new glory, and the name of Michael Angelo comes to blend with the memories of Dante and Francis, which throng upon us at La Vernia.

A well-favoured spot this shady grove of Francis seemed to us as we stood there that bright autumn

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evening, and looked down on the bare crags and huge masses of debris that lay upheaved about us on every side in wild confusion. For this was the one corner of the desolate rock where the beech-trees spread their leaves of tender green against the sky, and violets and cyclamen peeped out among the moss-grown trunks, paying silent tribute to the memory of him who prayed best, because he loved best all things both great and small, who thanked his Lord for the bright blossoms, and the green grass, and called the swallows his brothers and sisters.

And so, with the sun touching the highest Apennine tops with gold, and the sweet mountain air blowing in our faces across the slopes of Michael Angelo's native hills, we looked our last on La Vernia, and turned our faces southwards, wondering once more over the story of Francis, this great and tender heart which overflowed with such untold love to God and man.

## GIOVANNI COSTA—HIS LIFE AND ART: 1904

“ March to the tune of the voice of her,  
Breathing the balm of her breath,  
Loving the light of her skies.  
Blessed is he on whose eyes  
Dawns but her light as he dies.  
Blessed are ye that make choice of her  
Equal to life and to death.”—A. SWINBURNE.

COSTA's name and art are not unknown in this country. He often visited these shores, and, as he always said, found his best patrons in England. Many of our leading painters, George Mason and Burne-Jones, Sir Laurence Alma-Tadema and Mr. Watts were among his friends and admirers. One of them, Lord Leighton, lived on terms of affectionate intimacy with him for nearly half a century. Costa, on his part, exerted considerable influence on several English artists. He was one of the first to recognise Mason's talent and had a large share in the development of that master's style. Besides this, he formed a small school of his own in England, and numbered among his pupils the late Matthew Ridley Corbet, A.R.A., Lord Carlisle, Mr. Walter James, and others, whose refined and poetic landscapes are often seen in our chief exhibitions. Costa himself was a regular contributor to the summer shows at Burlington House, the Gros-

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venor, and the New Gallery during the last thirty years of his life, and his delicate views of the blue hills and reedy shores of Bocca d'Arno are familiar to us all. In 1882 he held an exhibition of his works in the Fine Art Society's rooms in Bond Street, which met with remarkable success and aroused admiration in the most unexpected quarters. To name only one instance, William Ernest Henley hailed Costa on this occasion as the direct successor of the French landscape-painters of 1830, and became from that moment his stoutest champion. In 1904 another exhibition of his paintings was held at the galleries of the Old Water Colour Society in Pall Mall, where a full and representative collection of his art was displayed. At the present time a considerable proportion of the Roman master's finest works are in English hands. One of his largest landscapes, a "Sunrise on the Mountains of Carrara," was presented to the National Gallery by his English friends in 1896, and now hangs in the Gallery of British Art. His "Bella di Lerici," the figure of a handsome contadina descending a steep hillside, was bought many years ago by the King, then Prince of Wales. Other important examples are in the possession of Lord Carlisle, Lord Davey, Mr. Douglas Freshfield, Mr. W. C. Cartwright, Mr. Percy Wyndham, Mr. Stopford Brooke, and Mrs. Albert Rutson.

What, then, is the claim that we make for Costa ?

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How may we define the special note that lends his art a permanent and enduring value? In the first place, it possesses the rare quality of distinction. There is no trace of formality or artificiality about his work. It bears the stamp of undeniable originality, of long and patient research, and is at the same time distinguished by unerring obedience to the great and abiding laws of design. When Costa began to study painting seriously, in the middle of the last century, Italian art had sunk to a very low ebb. The Roman artists who flourished in the forties and fifties seldom painted landscape except as a background for historical or mythological subjects. They revelled in theatrical effects and sensational colouring, and sought to attain popularity by aping the cheap mannerisms and worst defects of the French and Spanish school. Costa boldly broke with these false ideals and academic conventions, and went straight to Nature for his teaching, maintaining, with his great fellow countryman, Leonardo, that "if you do not build on this good foundation, you will labour with little honour and less profit." This close study and accurate observation of natural fact is the leading characteristic of all Costa's work. The Italy that he paints is not the conventional Italy of Claude and Poussin. His knowledge of his native land is of a deeper and more intimate kind. When he painted the picture of the

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Carrara mountains, now in the National Gallery, he rose at four o'clock each morning for several weeks, and walked five or six miles to the same place to watch for the precise moment when the morning mists would clear away and the sun break over the far hills. And so it has been with all his work. Like Corot he used to spend long days in the open air, laying wait for certain effects of light and atmosphere, and returning day by day to the same place in order that his first impressions might be renewed and deepened. There is no sign of haste or impatience in his work. He lingered lovingly over every detail, and often kept his pictures for years in his studio, refining and improving his conceptions and refusing to be content with anything short of perfection.

Next to Nature, Costa studied the Old Masters who were the glory of Italy in past ages. The Primitives of Florence and Siena, of Lombardy and Umbria, were the painters to whom he turned throughout his life with never-failing love and admiration. "Our Italy is beautiful, our race is noble and highly gifted," he wrote in one of his last appeals to the artists of Rome; "let us love our land and paint her as we see her, let us go to Nature and to the glorious examples of our Old Masters, and our work will be worthy of the name we bear." Here, then, we have Italian landscapes painted by an Italian master, in accordance



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with the best traditions of Italian art. The very technique that Costa employed was founded, as he has told us, on a careful study of the Old Masters. It was his practice, as Professor Angeli and Signora Agresti have told us,<sup>1</sup> to sketch out the subject of his picture in red monochrome, after which he laid in the shadows in grey, and added the blues and greens and browns, and finally the yellows and high lights. As he tersely explained the process himself, "First the fire, then the cinders, last of all the flame!" In the restraint and tranquillity of his style, in the directness and sincerity of his work, in the sober harmonies of his colouring, Costa's art has a certain affinity with the old Tuscans and Umbrians whom he loved so well. We can hang his landscapes on the same wall as their works without striking a discordant note.

On the other hand, Costa is thoroughly modern in the strong personal element that enters into his art. His landscapes are no mere servile imitations or photographic reproductions of the beauties of Nature. "The brain," he often said, "must play its part, the artist must make his own selection and give us his own impressions, not a mere inventory of separate facts!" This is what we feel so strongly

<sup>1</sup> *La Rassegna Internazionale*, 1901, p. 1, and *Rivista Moderna*, 1903, p. 71. Signora Agresti is also the author of an interesting appreciation of Costa in the *Studio* for 1903.

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in Costa's own transcripts of Nature. The painter's own emotion and delight in the scene, his intimate sympathy with the subject, is always present in his work and becomes part of the picture. In such little paintings as Lord Leighton's "Winter Evening in the Woods of Fajola," with the sheep feeding under the bare trees and the yellow light breaking over the low wooded hills, or in that other study of "Autumn in the Forests of Albano," he seems to summarise the peculiar scenery of the Alban hills, and makes us feel the innate spirit of the place and hour—"the intense tranquillity of silent hills and more than silent sky." Costa was, in fact, as Mr. Henley was fond of saying, "a thorough Wordsworthian." Nature had for him the same subtle attraction that it had for poets such as Shelley and Wordsworth, and deep at the root of all his renderings of her changeful moods we feel the same dim glimmerings of the truth that lies at the heart of things, the same mysterious sense of a Love which "impels all thinking things, all objects of all thought."

These are some of the different elements that help to make up the rare and indefinable charm of Costa's work. The range of his art, of course, is narrow. He confines himself almost entirely to one style of subject, and returns by preference to the same subjects. But within these limitations his art is very perfect and exquisite. "There is, however," as

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Leighton once wrote, "something even nobler than Costa's art, and that is his life." Few of those who admire the delicate finish of his paintings would ever have dreamt that this master whose work breathes an atmosphere so calm and serene has often braved prison and death, and risked all for his country's sake. When his pictures were exhibited in Bond Street, a well-known critic wrote that it was easy to see these paintings were the work of an exceptionally fortunate man who had led a prosperous and sheltered life, and knew nothing of the hard struggle for existence which is commonly the artist's lot. He was amazed to hear that Costa had fought on many a fiercely contested battlefield and had entered Rome in the van of the victorious army which stormed the bastions of Porta Pia in the war of 1870. The story of those heroic days deserves to be remembered.

Giovanni Costa was born in Rome on October 15, 1826. His father, Gioacchino Costa, owned a large woollen factory in Trastevere, and lived there with his family of sixteen children, in the days when the Borgo still retained its old gardens and mediæval towers. Giovanni, or Nino as his Roman friends affectionately called him, the fourteenth in the family, was intended for the law, but before he reached the age of fifteen his artistic leanings could no longer be restrained, and his parents reluctantly consented to

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his choice. His first teacher was Baron Camuccini, a fashionable painter in the pseudo-classical style. The ardent soul of the young Roman, however, chafed at the restrictions of conventional art, and his master had the good sense to recognise this. Just as Paul Delaroche said to Millet, "Tu es trop nouveau pour moi," so Camuccini said to young Costa, "Go your own way, leave the studio and learn of Nature for yourself." The boy obeyed gladly and went back to his sketches and open-air life. But the times were not favourable to the study of art. Italy was slowly waking from her long sleep. The spirit of revolution was abroad, and young Costa flung himself with his whole might into the struggle for freedom. Before he was two-and-twenty he had already drawn the sword in the good cause. "During my whole political life," he writes in a fragment of autobiography which he once placed in my hands, "without party spirit, I have supported whichever side seemed to be working most honourably and effectively for the freedom and welfare of my country. I have placed myself and my fortune at the service of one political party after another, seeking neither honours nor rewards, and receiving none." In 1848 the young artist joined the Roman legion which fought under the Papal flag against the Austrians, and when Pio Nono disappointed the hopes which he had raised

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among the friends of liberty, he became a follower of Mazzini. He fought with Garibaldi in the gallant attack on Vascello, and was one of the defenders of Porta San Pancrazio. When the Papal forces triumphed, and Rome was no longer a safe place for the young patriot, he took refuge in the forests of Ariccia, and there devoted himself to the study of art. During the next seven years Costa lived on the Roman Campagna, between the Alban hills, the Sabine range and the sea, without once missing a sunrise or a sunset. On these plains, "spiritualised" in Sterling's words, "by endless recollections," the young painter lived in daily communion with Nature. He saw the wide reaches of the Campagna break into vivid green under the touch of spring, and turn crimson with decaying vegetation in the late summer and autumn; he watched the red glow of the sunset touch the long lines of arches which cross the violet plains, and linger behind the tombs of the Appian Way, and the beauty of those scenes sank deep into his soul. The pictures which he painted at this period show how close was his acquaintance with the country and its inhabitants. We see the peasants threshing and winnowing the grain, the charcoal-burners at work in the forest, the women waiting with their jars at the fountain in the groves of Ariccia, or collecting dead wood under the wind-blown pines on the desolate sands of Ardea.

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The Pontine marshes have supplied Costa with many subjects, more especially the immediate neighbourhood of Porto d'Anzio and the Circean shore. "*Cœli enarrant gloriam Dei*" is the title of a wide view over the sea and the marshes, under a fine sky and rolling cumulus cloud. "A Sirocco Day on the Shore near Rome," the property of Mr. Stopford Brooke, shows us the same coast with a foreground of stunted brushwood, and a gleam of light breaking through the heavy clouds on the foam-crested waves and the tired woodman bending under his load. One exquisite little picture on which the painter himself set great store is a "Sunrise near Terracina," with a stretch of grassy sward and ploughland in the foreground, and in the distance the summit of Monte Circeo rising above the pale blue line of sea—a little gem of rich and delicate colour. Another small painting which had an especial interest for Costa is that of a fishing-boat drawn upon the beach under the burning glow of an August sunset. This little study was long the property of Lord Leighton, and in that boat Costa and George Mason once lived during a whole summer. Towards the close of this period Costa painted the large picture of "Women carrying Wood to the Boats on the Shore of Porto d'Anzio," a work in which the studies of his Roman years may be said to be summed up. Here the statuesque forms and majestic bearing of these

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peasants of Latin race agree with the noble lines of the landscape and the sombre tints of sky and forest, and no one can wonder at the admiration which the Roman master's painting excited in the breast of Corot and his brother-artists when it was exhibited at Paris in 1862. Many years afterwards it was bought by the Italian Government, and now hangs in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome. In this and all the works of the same period we note the subtle skill with which the painter renders the different effects of the Italian atmosphere, the brilliant clearness of *tramontana* weather, the flying dust that fills the air when the *sirocco* blows, the parched look of the sandy shores and motionless sleep of the waves on a sultry day, or the wet grey mists muffling the hills after a rainy night.

During the seven years when he lived in the Campagna Costa formed some of his most lasting friendships with foreign artists, many of whom joined him in his outdoor studies. Among these were Franz Lenbach, the great German portrait-painter ; Arnold Böcklin, whose mystic temperament and passion for beauty found a quick response in Costa's soul ; Cornelius and Overbeck, whose sincerity and reverent love for the old masters he admired if he could not share their wish to recall a vanished past. Then, too, George Mason joined him in his wanderings, and young

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Leighton, who was painting his "Procession of Cimabue" in Rome, first learnt to know and love him. The personality of the Roman master was a singularly attractive one. His fine and thoughtful countenance, clear brown eyes, and strongly marked features are familiar to us from Leighton's portrait, while the childlike simplicity and modesty of his nature, his sincerity and enthusiasm, endeared him to many who, having once known him, remained his friends for life.

But the noise of battle soon came to break the calm of these happy days. In 1859 Victor Emanuel raised his standard, and Costa enlisted in the corps of Piedmontese Lancers, known as the Aosta Cavalleggeri, and fought at Solferino and San Martino. After the peace of Villafranca he retired to Florence, and this city remained his home until the final reunion of Italy in 1870. The scenery of Tuscany inspired him with several charming pictures. He painted the ilexes of the Boboli gardens, and the flowering elms of Vaga Loggia, and made a dreamlike sketch of "Evening in the Cascine," with boat and woods and river all flooded with the solemn rapture of the sunset. Then, too, he penetrated into the forest of Gombo, and the remote regions at the mouth of the Arno, where he found the subjects of many of his finest works in this district, as yet unknown to the tourist. Three of the most important are now in England: the



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“Sunrise at Bocca d’ Arno,” in the National Gallery ; the “ Fiume Morto,” belonging to Mrs. Albert Rutson—a romantic scene of wooded gorge, sleeping waters, and purple mountain ; and Mr. Douglas Freshfield’s “Autumn Morning in the Mountains of Carrara,” a view of the same hills veiled in white mist, with the rising sun faintly flushing the slopes and a single pine-tree standing out on the russet plain, waiting for the springtime that will not always tarry.

In 1862 Costa went to Paris, where his works met with general admiration from the masters of the Fontainebleau school. Corot hailed him as a comrade, and embraced him in the name of Hobbema as the worthy successor of the great landscape-painters of old. He visited Rousseau at Barbizon, and conversed with Millet, whose serious and noble character impressed him deeply. It was then, in the woods of Marlotte, that he painted his life-size figure of a nude nymph at the fountain, which he kept in his studio until he died, always altering and improving it. As a rule, it must be owned, Costa’s large figures were not successful, but when this “Ninfa nel Bosco” was exhibited, after his death, the Roman critics declared it to be the painter’s masterpiece. In 1863 Costa went to England at Leighton’s invitation, and the two friends together visited Mason in his Staffordshire home, and cheered that sorely tried artist in his

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struggle with failing health and poverty. Here Costa, after his wont, discovered unexpected beauties in the Black Country, a district which he often compared with the Roman Campagna, and found new subjects for his brush in the wooded hollows and sequestered pools of remote country places. Either at this time or during the later visits which he paid to England, he painted pictures of Kensington Palace, Bamborough Castle, Naworth, and other historic houses, and took new delight in rendering the moist verdure and luxuriant foliage of English gardens, and the rolling clouds and misty effects of our English skies.

In 1864 Costa was recalled to Rome by new political developments, and did his utmost to awaken a patriotic spirit among his fellow-citizens. His studio of the Via Margutta became the meeting-place of the revolutionary party, and when the forlorn hope of Villa Glori proved a failure, he himself joined Garibaldi and served on the general staff at Mentana. After that disastrous day, Costa, feeling that the gates of Rome were for ever closed to him, returned again to Florence, overwhelmed with sadness at the failure of his hopes and the loss of many of his dearest friends. In the bitterness of his heart he sought consolation in lonely wanderings on the shores of the Tuscan Maremma, and here in these dark hours he painted his noble picture of "Earth's Last Kiss to

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the Dying Day." The sea-gulls circling in the stormy sky above the wild waste of waters, and the waves breaking on the desolate strand, all help to give the same impression of dreariness and regret for a past that can return no more. "Che paia il giorno pianger che si muore!" But the hour of deliverance was nearer than he dreamt. Once more the call to arms sounded, and in 1870 Costa, true to the old cause, enlisted in the ranks of the Italian army which marched upon Rome, and was the first to enter the breach in the walls of Porta Pia. At the head of his troops he fought his way through the streets and was the first to enter the Capitol and sign a decree for the release of political prisoners. The dream of his youth was at length fulfilled. Costa felt that his work was done, and although he remained a member of the Municipal Council during the next seven years, he took no further part in politics. "The fact that I worked with all parties in turn," he wrote in 1882, "has left me the goodwill of none, but at least I am free to devote myself to the study of my art." With true patriotism he sought to raise the tone of national art, and formed the society of "In Arte Libertas" in the hope of drawing the artists of the rising generation into closer union, and inspiring them to emulate the triumphs of the mighty past. Meanwhile his own efforts after higher perfection never slackened.

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“Do well,” he said to young artists, “and you will reach the hearts of the few; do better, and you will be understood of all.” Much of Costa’s best work was done during the next twenty years. He travelled in other parts of Italy, often accompanied by Leighton, and brought back sketches of those enchanted regions “where earth has a garment of glories and a murmur of musical flowers.” He painted the silvery olives of Lerici and the terraced gardens of Capri, Venice rising from the green lagoon in the radiant freshness of summer morning, and the waves at the foot of the Faraglioni rocks dancing and sparkling in the evening sunlight. Umbria attracted him by its rugged mountain scenery and memories of St. Francis, and his admiration for the Saint of Assisi found its highest expression in the large picture of “Sunrise at Perugia—Fra Francesco and Fra Sole”—which was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1886, and became the property of Lord Carlisle. The opening verse of Francis’ hymn to all living creatures is the motto of this painting :

“Laudato sia Dio mio Signore  
Con tutte le sue creature;  
Specialmente Messer lo Frate Sole  
Il quale giorno e illumina mii per lui.  
Et ello è bello et radiante cum grande splendore;  
Di te, Signore, porta significazione.”

St. Francis is represented in the habit of his order, standing on the brow of the hill, lifting up his hands

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in a rapture of joy of thanksgiving as the sun, rising above the dark mass of Monte Subasio, floods the land of the saint's birth with splendour. Below lies the broad bed of the Tiber and, in all its varied loveliness, the fair Umbrian valley with bell-towers and villages, grey olives and tall cypresses, scattered over the plain. Every detail of leaf and flower is painted with infinite love and patience, and hill and valley are blended together in one rich harmony of colour. When Costa painted that picture he evidently had in his mind the lines of the *Paradiso*, in which Dante sings of the fortunate city hanging on the mountain-side, where rose on the world the new sun whose bright beams were to gladden the whole earth. "Therefore, let he who names yonder city no longer say Assisi but Orient!"

In 1885 Costa bought a villa at Bocca d'Arno, that region where he had already painted some of his finest pictures and where he spent the summer and autumn months of his remaining years. Here Leighton and his other English friends came to see him, and his happiest hours were spent in sketching among the hills. Up to the last days of his life the old *maestro* might be seen, going out before dawn on September mornings, followed by a child bearing his easel and brushes, to watch the sunrise or catch some new effect of light or colour that he was trying to paint. Years had bowed his back and weakened his

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powers, but his enthusiasm and love of Nature were as great as they had been in the time when he spent long days and nights on the Campagna, fifty years before. In 1881 Costa paid another visit to England, and in the following June held the successful exhibition of his works which has been already mentioned. His work was never fully appreciated by his own countrymen, and he often declared laughingly that he was the most unpopular artist in Italy! But in England, as he always owned, he met with a recognition and a kindness that were altogether beyond his deserts. Fourteen years later he came back again, and was the guest of Lord Carlisle for several months during the summer of 1896. Leighton had died a short time before, and Costa was present at the sale of his works, and recognised with tears in his eyes the sketches which he had seen his friend paint in Rome forty years ago. He himself had lately suffered heavy reverses of fortune, but he met these changes with his wonted courage and equanimity, and was deeply grateful to his English friends for the subscription which they raised to present one of his pictures to the National Gallery. What pleased him most of all was to find the names of Sir Edward Burne-Jones and Mr. Watts—a painter whom he revered above all others—at the head of the list. “May I go home,” the old master asked, “and tell

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my friends in Rome that Mr. Watts really thought a picture of mine worthy to hang in the National Gallery ? ” And when Mr. Watts himself confirmed the statement he replied, “ Then I shall die happy.”

The master's last days, we rejoice to think, were spent in peace and happiness. In his old studio of the Via Margutta, or in the more spacious rooms of the Palazzo Odescalchi, he lived, surrounded by his own sketches and the memorials of his artist friends, the portraits of his two daughters painted by Leighton and Alma-Tadema, and pictures or studies by Corot and Decamps, by Arnold Böcklin and Lenbach. But the fatigue and hardships which he had undergone during his different campaigns, and the cold nights which he had spent on the Campagna, had told upon his vigorous frame. He suffered from repeated attacks of arthritis and partly lost the use of one arm.

“ Since my last illness,” he wrote with his stiffening hand, “ I paint for fewer hours at a time, but with greater intensity and deeper earnestness than before. Each movement gives me pain, but I realise the joy of overcoming this for love of my art. So I have at length found that great God who lives at the heart of things, and I seek with all my might to set forth that divine idea which lies at the root of art. And, burdened as I am with the weight of years, I take courage when I think of the many good friends and great painters whom I have known and loved, and my

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trust and faith grow every day stronger in the Eternal and the Unseen."

To the last Costa worked at his art, feeling that he had still something to say, and painted new pictures or planned fresh works on a grander scale. In the New Gallery of 1902 he exhibited two studies of his favourite regions. One was a "Daybreak at Bocca d'Arno," with the cool morning light stealing over the blue ridges of Carrara, "*le nostre montagne*," as the aged master fondly called them. The other was a leaf from an old sketch-book, a study of the full moon rising over the Tyrrhenian sea while the last crimson streaks of the sunset are seen dying in the western horizon. It was a presage of the coming end. In the summer he went as usual to Bocca d'Arno and began to paint another picture. But it was never finished. The sands of life were fast running out, and on the last day of January 1903, within sight of his own mountains, the "strong heroic soul" passed away. No man ever deserved better of his country than this Roman painter; none has left a purer fame or a more honoured memory behind him.



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